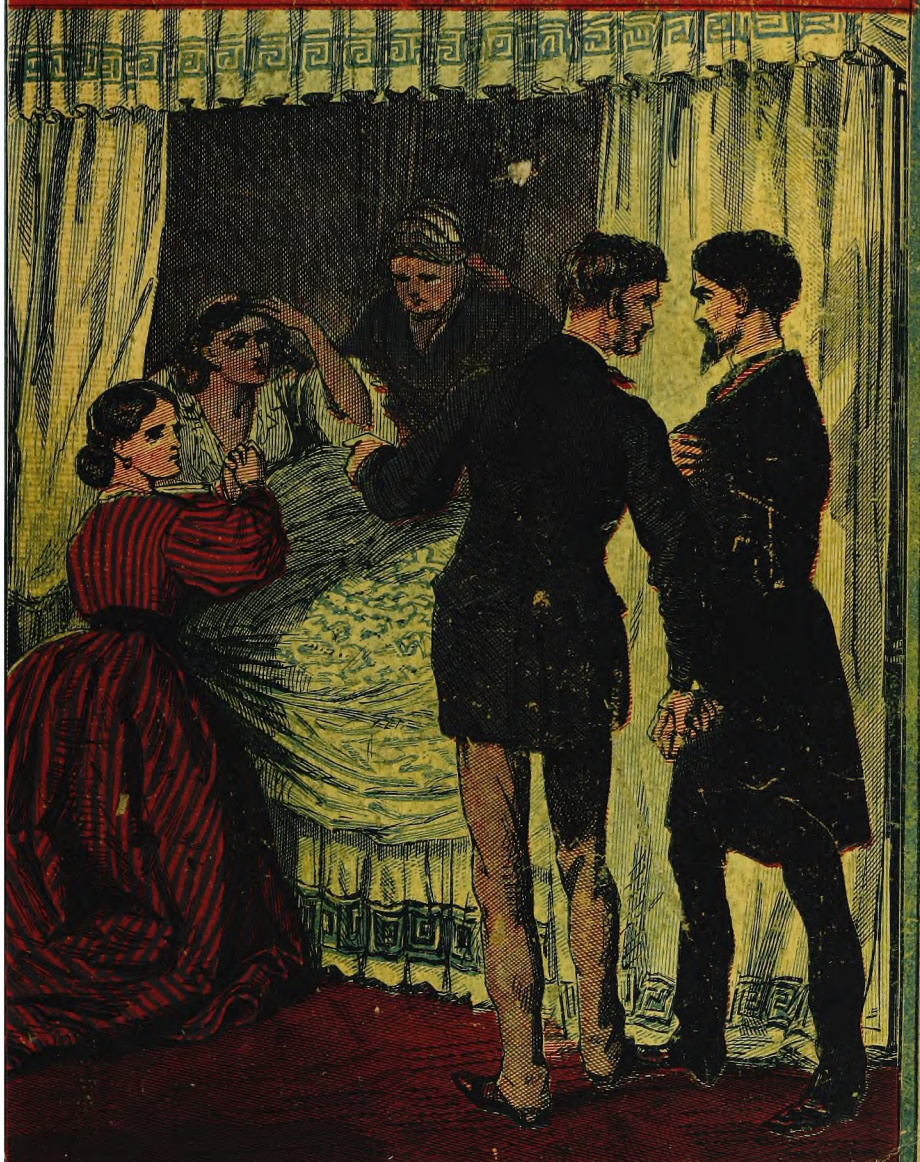




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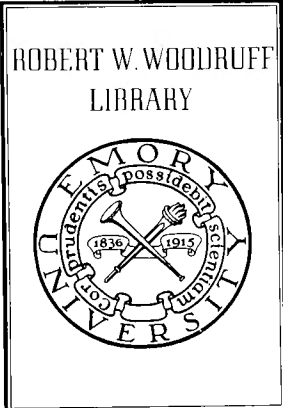
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# ONE AND TWENTY.

BY

FREDERICK WILLIAM ROBINSON,

AUTHOR OF

“WILDFLOWER,” “THE HOUSE OF ELMORE,” “A WOMAN’S RANSOM,”  
“MR. STEWART’S INTENTIONS,” ETC., ETC.

“An’ O! for ane-and-twenty, Tam,  
An’ hey, sweet ane-and-twenty, Tam.”  
BURNS.

**NEW EDITION.**

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1867.

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## BOOK I.

---

“*Iachimo.* I am *down again.*”

SHAKSPERE'S “*Cymbeline,*” *Act V., Sc. 4.*

“Yet let us own that trade has much of chance;  
Not all the careful by their care advance;  
With the same parts and prospects, one a seat  
Builds for himself; one finds it in the Fleet.”

CRABBE'S “*Borough,*” *Letter VIII.*





# ONE AND TWENTY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### “DOWN AGAIN ”

I BEGIN this story from my first start in life. I began life in earnest at an early age—at an age when other boys, free from the iron hand of necessity, are at their mother's apron strings or grinding lessons in the public schools.

The only son of a poor tradesman, struggling hard for a living down a back street in Bethnal Green—Bethnal Green, a world of struggling men and women in itself—I was brought up with a perfect consciousness of the terrible enemy lurking round the corner. Every day taught me what a task it was for them I called father and mother to fight for a living in that dark crowded neighbourhood, and not give way beneath the host which tried to ruin them.

A host of rate-collectors, to begin with, that was down upon them with all manner of horrible taxes, and harassed them week after week for payment, and came and cut the gas off, and the water off, and seized portions of their furniture, and was more troublesome and exacting than the landlord, a flinty-hearted being who haunted the little baker's shop in Bethnal Green after every quarter-day. A host of customers that came with dog's-eared penny memorandum-books wherein each debt was entered; lank-visaged, poverty-marked customers, with claw-like hands which clutched at the loaves greedily, and bore them off; customers who paid a shilling or two on Saturday night, who begged for trust—“More trust, good Mr. Farley, my husband's out of work, on strike, on the loose; don't say to

a woman with six children, and one dying, you can't let me have bread another week, for God's sake!" A host of beggars, real and sham; a host of thieves that watched for the parlour-door to close on the shopkeeper's back, to rush in and make a snatch at something; a host of troubles in every grisly shape which haunts a parish neck-deep in poverty.

My father was the worst man in the world for a tradesman—more especially for a tradesman in a poor neighbourhood. Simple and soft-hearted, he was a man easily imposed upon by the crafty, and too readily impressed by the sorrows of the unfortunate. Had it not been for his wife—not my poor mother, weaker and gentler than even he, my mother who died when I was five years old, and left this life with a whispered blessing on her pale-faced boy—the little baker's shop in Harp-street would have closed its shutters on the daylight years before I made my early start in life.

My stepmother, whom my father married sixteen months after his first wife's death, was a wonderful woman for business—a woman whose capabilities were not lost in Bethnal Green. My father did not marry her for love; it was another of his struggles, that making up his mind to marry her at all. She was a strapping, good-looking bar-maid at the Pencutters' Arms over the way; a bustling woman, with a sharp eye to change and bad shillings; a woman, honest and hard-working, and one likely to make a good wife for a weak-headed shopkeeper. My father used to look at her very thoughtfully with his care-troubled eyes every evening, as he put his yellow jug on the pewter-covered counter of the Pencutters' Arms, and said, "A pint of porter, Mary, please," and Mary, although a quick girl in her way, did not read his looks correctly, or dream of setting her gaily-trimmed cap at "Old Farley," his invariable cognomen in Harp-street.

When old Farley proposed, late one Saturday night as the landlady was dozing over the parlour fire and the potman was putting up the shutters, Mary said, "What nonsense!" and "Well, I never!" and then, "She'd think of it." Mary thought of it all that night, and being of a decisive turn of mind, accepted him on the Sunday, and was Mrs. Farley a month afterwards. She made him a good wife, a hard-working careful wife, and was not the worst of "new mothers" to his child. Troubled sometimes with the business, and bad-tempered very often, fond of "giving it" to my father in high words, and "giving it" to me in very hard and noisy slaps, she was

still a good-hearted woman and a true one, and I look back at her with that feeling of boy-affection which I had for her as my father's wife—an affection distinct from that deeper one which lay buried in Bethnal Green churchyard.

My stepmother was the first who broached the subject of my start in life, to which the first line of this history alludes. There had been thunder in the air some weeks, and it burst over the heads of my father and myself one sultry summer evening, when we sat round the tea-table in that queer little back parlour into which the sun seldom shone.

"That boy, Mr. Farley, will eat us out of house and home."

"Eh? what, Mary?" cried my father; "that boy, who—Philip?"

"Yes, Philip."

My stepmother looked full at my father, as if not ashamed of her assertion, and my father hid his face in his pint mug of tea.

"He's twelve years old."

"Going on for thirteen," I corrected immediately.

"Going on for thirteen," mused my father; "good gracious me, how time gallops away. Why, we've been married, Mary, nearly six years—nearly six years, as I'm alive."

"Come, come," said his bustling wife, "we are not talking of how long we've been married—goodness knows what would have become of you, Farley, if you had been left to yourself—we're talking about Philip here."

"Ah! yes, yes," was the reply, "Philip, as you say, Mary."

"Mr. Farley," said his grave helpmate, "have you looked over your books lately?"

"N-no," replied my father, in a hesitative manner.

"Then you had better, Mr. F.," observed his wife, "for the state they're in is awful!"

"Oh, dear, dear! I thought as much!"

"And what object you can have in such a horrid lot of blots and smudges, the Lord knows, for I don't."

My father muttered something about the wretched pens that were sold in Bethnal Green.

"There's the rent nearly due," said my stepmother, gradually working herself into a state of excitement, "and I have only scraped together four pounds seven shillings. We are getting on worse and worse, Farley; and if there's a roof over our heads this day twelvemonth, we ought to be grateful for it, that's all. There's that wretched surly man called again for the church rate; there's Barnes only paid a shilling off one

pound seventeen, and the woman you've been a trusting and a trusting because her husband's out of work, has gone and died, poor creature, and that's the long and short of it. And now, there's Philip, he's growing a big boy; his school money is a hard tax upon our earnings, and one less in family might help us, especially at this time, when we are at sixpence-halfpenny a quartern, and it costs us sevenpence first hand. Ah, me!"

Mrs. Farley sighed, and poured out a second cup of tea.

"What do you think, Mary, can be done—ahem—with *him*?"

"Plenty of things."

The plenty of things seemed to bewilder my father, for he looked vacantly round the room and up at the ceiling, and then at Mrs. Farley again.

"There's your wife's brother, now."

"William Barchard," ejaculated my father.

"Yes, if you remember, he—*shop*!"

My father rose at the hint, went up the parlour steps into the shop, weighed and delivered a loaf to a dirty shock-headed little boy, booked the debt in one of the eternal dog's-eared memorandum books, and came creeping back to his place at the tea-table.

"If you remember," continued my stepmother, "Mr. Barchard talked of discharging his boy, and why should not your Philip earn six or seven shillings a-week as well as anybody else? The money would be a help to us."

"Philip is a quick boy. I should have liked him to remain at school a year or two longer; he's getting on wonderfully at figures, Mary."

"He can go to evening school, or practise here at home."

"So he can," said my father, rubbing his hands together in a nervous manner.

"Philip," said my stepmother, turning suddenly to me, "how should you like to be your Uncle William's boy?"

"Very well."

"You don't say that to please your father and me, Philip?" she asked, sharply. "You mean it."

"Yes."

"It is early to begin the world, my boy," remarked my second mother; "but many a boy has begun at an earlier age, at harder work, and seen grand days before he died. Many a man—*shop*!"

Out went my father again; another loaf, another item in another memorandum-book.

"Many a boy," continued my stepmother, "has started in

life at your age, and been a gentleman at one and twenty. You stand a chance, Phil, as well as any one who has gone before and made a fortune, though you are a little headstrong. You are the first boy in arithmetic class, you know."

"Yes; and Jack Bradley, at our school, is sixteen years of age, mother."

"To-morrow you shall see your uncle, Philip."

"I wish it was anybody else."

"Anybody rather than Mr. Barchard?"

"Yes."

"Never mind, boy; you'll soon fall into his ways, if you only get the chance. It's very silly our building on this place for you; places are soon filled now-a-days."

My father returned to the parlour, bringing with him two great account-books, an inkstand, and a torn sheet of very dirty blotting-paper.

A fit of the books was threatening. These fits occurred once a month or so, and required perfect quietness in our parlour. I sat by the empty fire-grate, with my head against the mantelpiece, and watched my father's haggard face turned to the great account-books, his half-bewildered stare at the rows of smeared figures, his pen between his lips, his nervous, agitated hand trembling as it turned leaf after leaf. It was his Book of Fate, in which little hope was to be read for the future, let him study never so hard. I may venture, without egotism, to say here that at twelve years of age I was a better accountant than my father—certainly I could not have been a worse—but my father's pride or shame would not allow me, at that age, to lay a finger on his books. Therefore he sat and studied, and ground his teeth over his accounts, and made nothing clearly out of them, save that he was getting on very badly in the world, and everybody in the world with whom he was personally acquainted was uncommonly fond of credit.

After a time I strayed into the shop, took my post at the street door, and watched the straggling inhabitants of Harp Street. My stepmother, ever busy, sat behind the counter patching the Sunday black waistcoat of my father, and although I stood two good hours on the threshold of my home, she did not once intrude upon my thoughts.

And they were natural boy-thoughts of mine that night. Thoughts of the schoolmaster and schoolfellows, who would miss me from the front room of Number Four in the next street when I was busy with the world. I knew that I should not



go to school again, even if my Uncle Barchard did not want a boy. I knew affairs were very black at No. 54, Harp Street, Bethnal Green, and it was my part, with the rest, to help to lighten them. I did not admire Uncle Barchard; I did not care to be in his service, he was so hard and cold a man. I would have preferred the place of errand boy to some of the large tradesmen in the vicinity to sitting in Mr. Barchard's chaise, and holding the reins whilst he was busy with his customers. My Uncle Barchard was the one dislike of my life; yet he was my dead mother's only brother, and that mother had loved him very dearly.

My Uncle Barchard was one of those men of whom my stepmother had lately spoken; a man who had started in life with a few pence in his pocket, who was a poor clerk at twenty-two shillings a-week when my father fell in love with his delicate-looking sister, and who was then, at forty-seven years of age, chief agent and collector for a great London flour firm, and pocketing a salary of six hundred a-year.

Deep in my own thoughts, standing at the door of my father's little shop that summer evening, I tried to draw the picture of myself when years had made a man of me, wondering whether the world would treat me gently or drag me down to ruin.

Those who had had such thoughts as mine when they were young, perhaps, were drifting down the dimly-lighted street—shadowy figures of poverty, shadowy and more dark figures of crime—shadows of honest labour trudging home to wife and children—shadows of the desolate and lost, hurrying, with their flaunting rags, to brighter thoroughfares where Idleness and Folly might be duped.

A horse and chaise—quite a novelty in Harp Street—stopped before a shop a few yards lower down on the opposite side of the way, and distracted my thoughts from foolish speculation.

It was another baker's shop, a brilliantly-lighted shop, with plate-glass windows and fancy gas-burners, the opposition which two years ago had opened in the neighbourhood and spoiled my father's business. The owner of that shop was a great man too—another man who had risen on a sixpence and set up shops in every part of London—a man who speculated in small profits for quick returns, and was said to be worth "heaps and heaps of money."

"There's Mr. Tackeridge called for the week's money over the way, mother," I cried.

"I see him," answered Mrs. Farley.

"The shopwoman is giving him two bags of silver, mother, such large ones! Look."

"I don't want to look, Philip," said my stepmother, testily.

"Is that Tackeridge?" inquired my father, putting his head round the parlour door, with the pen still in his mouth.

"Yes."

"I want to speak to him a moment about our awful price here," said my father; "perhaps I might induce him to go up a halfpenny a loaf. Philip, my boy, just run across, and ask Mr. Tackeridge to stay a moment. Mary, where's my coat?"

Mr. Tackeridge was skipping briskly to his chaise when I touched him on the arm. Mr. Tackeridge, a tall, slim man, of three or four and thirty, with a profusion of sandy hair and whiskers hanging about a keen-looking face, stopped and stared at me.

"What's the matter, boy?"

"If you please, Sir, father wants to speak to you."

"Who's your father?"

"Mr. Farley, Sir."

"Oh."

Mr. Tackeridge gave a skip into the chaise, and seized his whip.

"I can't stay now, boy. I'm in a very great hurry. He can see me at Mark Lane."

"My father's coming now, Sir. He wants to talk to you about the price, 'the awful price,' he says, Sir."

Mr. Tackeridge burst into a merry little laugh, whipped his horse, and drove off in the best of spirits.

"Why wouldn't he stop—what did he say, Phil?" asked my father, full of indignation, as I met him at the door.

"He was in a very great hurry—you could see him at Mark Lane."

"A shame-faced scamp," ejaculated my father, "frightened to meet a poor old man like me."

He glanced at the opposition over the way, shading his eyes with his hand, as though dazzled with the lights.

"What's that—what's that? They're changing the tickets in the window. Oh Lord! I hope he's not going down again."

But Mr. Tackeridge was "going down again," and that immediately. Mr. Tackeridge was a bustling man, anxious to create a stir in Bethnal Green, and earn a good name amongst

his customers. He did not care for the very bad name his poorer brethren of the loaf bestowed upon him. So, from the window of good Mr. Tackeridge the baker, there flashed upon the delighted vision of the Harp Street starveling a huge handbill ornamented with great Roman capitals and a Brobdignagian 6.

It was soon over Bethnal Green, that "GLORIOUS NEWS ! DOWN AGAIN ! BEST BREAD, 6D." The poor blessed Tackeridge for that half-penny deduction, and the bakers anathematised him heartily as they set up their own sixpenny tickets in the windows, and began selling at an uncomfortable loss.

My father, with a heavy heart, turned his own "6d." to the light. I am not certain that he did not shed a few tears over the old battered tin ticket on which the simple numeral was inscribed.

"He can afford to lose ten or twenty pounds with his other shops at higher prices," said my stepmother, savagely ; "may he feel what it is to struggle for a penny as we have struggled these last three years."

"No, no," said my father, gently, "I do not wish him harm. Don't say that, Mary, please. Mr. Burton does not teach us that."

(Mr. Burton was the Methodist preacher of Harp Street Chapel.)

"I don't care," said Mrs. Farley, pettishly.

"I shall see him to-morrow at Mark Lane. Perhaps in half an hour's quiet talk I may be able to persuade him to change his mind, and go up like a good Christian to sevenpence."

"Don't go on with such fool's talk as that, Farley," cried my stepmother ; "have you done your books ?"

"Not quite."

The mention of books brought my father to his senses. He retreated into the back parlour, my stepmother set to work afresh at the black waistcoat, and I resumed my place at the door, and thought of Mr. Tackeridge, the great baker, whose trade was swallowing up my father's.

And this swallowing up goes on day after day incessantly—the myriads in the water drop war not against each other more ferociously than the myriads on this ball of earth revolving round the sun. The minnows in the stream of trade, law, physic, literature, and all the sciences, go down the throats of the great-bellied Tritons, and the world forgets they ever lived.

## CHAPTER II.

UNCLE BARCHARD.

If there is one spot in merry England more devoted than another to the healthy business of money-making—one spot in which everything is sacred to the Golden Calf, and where the lips of men move only to the tune of figures—sweetly whispered hundreds and thousands—that spot is within a few minutes' walk of London Bridge. It is a great vortex in which the money-makers are whirling round and round, sinking occasionally by the weight of their own mistakes—a place where seller and buyer meet thrice a-week and haggle for a shilling—a temple where fortunes are being made or lost. It draws within its circle men of all classes, of all religions, of all degrees of principle. Wheat merchants and their agents, fat millionaires, who, on the verge of the grave, wrestle for a few more thousands ere they die ; London millers and millers from the country—many of them of the sober society of Friends, and none the less money worshippers for that—flour-factors, corn-chandlers, bakers.

Need I say that charmed spot is situated in Mark Lane—that narrow dingy lane, down which more bankrupt-hearts have passed in its time than ever crossed the “Bridge of Sighs”—that hot, close lane, where the noises never cease, and where one of the pulses of the great city is always beating feverishly ?

At one o'clock on the following day the Mark Lane Corn Exchange was at its height of business and excitement when my father and I went slowly up the steps. It was a great bee-hive in a very disorderly state, with everybody buzzing ; men, with note-books in their hands, running in and out as if for the sole purpose of creating a confusion ; men on the steps booking orders ;—men in the Exchange holding other men by the button-holes, and whispering confidentially ;—men before small counters, stooping over little bags of grain, shaking up handfuls of corn and scattering them about the pavement—a golden harvest for the sweeper ;—men with blue paper packets of flour, resembling large Seidlitz powders, opening and tasting ;—men in search of other men who were looking for them everywhere ;—men quarrelling with their millers about the price, about the quality, about the time they took to execute

their orders ;—millers and wheat merchants in deep confabulation ;—shabby-genteel bakers pleading for a little more delay ere they settle that account, or begging hard for ten more sacks, to be paid for in a fortnight ;—a ceaseless din of tongues and tread of feet, a chinking of money up stairs in the coffee-room ;—a heaving sea of black and white hats and Quaker “squats,”—a never-ending talk of cash.

It seemed to me impossible to pick out my Uncle Barchard from this mass ; but my father knew Mark Lane better—would he had known the secret of trading in it better !—and steered his way through the mob of business-men, holding me tightly by the hand. He knew Mr. Barchard always hovered near one place, and that he should pounce upon him presently.

My father found him standing near one of the little counters that I have already mentioned, discoursing with two stylish, tip-top, fashionable bakers. Mr. Barchard, by a significant roll of his left eye, implied a knowledge of his brother-in-law’s presence, and my father drew back to wait his turn.

Whilst we waited one or two gentlemen ran against my father and shook him heartily by the hand, but did not inquire if he was a buyer that day—it was hardly worth the risk. I leaned against the wall—a stray atom on that turbulent ocean—and watched my Uncle Barchard.

He was a stout man of forty years of age, and some five feet ten in height—a large-limbed, heavy kind of man, who was not to be trusted in chaises with weak springs, and who would have come off badly in a fall—a man who would have been scowled at for the thirteenth in an omnibus, and have looked out of place on a race-horse or in a wager boat—a man of many stones. His face was broad and sleepy-looking, lit up and redeemed from total dulness by two great brown eyes, which had within their depths an observant, calculating look, eyes too which suggested thoughts of their owner having been rather a handsome fellow once upon a time. His nose and mouth were large, and his neck had long since disappeared between his shoulders, the weight of his head proving at last too much for them. His hands and feet—conspicuous articles in his personal appearance—were almost huge enough for the figures that guard the temple of Rameses.

A few minutes sufficed to settle the business of the stylish bakers—a line in Mr. Barchard’s note-book, a shake of the hands, a grim kind of smile on my uncle’s visage, and they were gone, and he was looking round for my father.



My father and I advanced.

"Well, Philip," observed Mr. Barchard, in a dry, deep tone, "what's the matter? Nothing wrong with the last lot of flour, I hope?"

"Nothing, Mr. William, thank you," said my father.

"Shall we settle the account up stairs?"

"I have not come to settle it to-day, Mr. William," said my father, meekly; "the price is very bad, and Tackeridge is doing all he can to make it worse. Perhaps you will be kind enough to mention that to Mr. Crawley?"

"I will."

My uncle was a man who seldom wasted words. I stood by my father's side, looking up into Mr. Barchard's face, and Mr. Barchard had, by a slight glance and the ghost of a nod, acknowledged the existence of his sister's child, but as for an inquiry concerning the state of my health, I had not received that, and knowing Uncle Barchard pretty well, I had not expected it.

"I don't wish to take up your time, Mr. William," said my father, "so I will just say what I came for, and then be off."

Mr. Barchard nodded.

"When you were at my house last week, you happened to say that your boy was very troublesome, and you intended to get rid of him. I think a slight dispute with another boy whom he had accidentally struck in the eye with the whip originated the conversation—and——"

"Yes, yes," remarked Mr. Barchard, impatiently, "well, well?"

"And if you want a boy at any time—I don't want to get the other out of his situation, mind—I should take it as a favour if you would remember Philip here; he's a very handy boy, indeed, and—although I say it myself—a very good and quiet boy."

My uncle's eyes rested on me.

"He's very young."

"Nearly thirteen," said I.

"You want something for him to do, then, Philip?"

My father hung his head. It was an acknowledgment of how low he had fallen, and he could only imply it by looking on the ground.

"Let him come on Monday to Crawley and Hodkins's mills—I'll try him. You know the way, boy?"

"Yes; I've been once or twice with father's messages."

"Very well ; then come at eight o'clock."

My uncle pursed his lips, thus dismissing the subject and his relatives together.

My father thanked Mr. Barchard, and retired. Through the busy crowd we threaded our way and came on to the hot pavement of Mark Lane again. Bustling in our direction, with his right arm swinging violently, came Mr. Tackeridge, the speculative baker.

"I made up my mind to speak to him the first time I had a chance," said my father, "and now I've got him !"

Mr. Tackeridge was in a hurry, and would have hastened by my father without observing him, had not my father caught him by the sleeve and stayed his progress.

Mr. Tackeridge's face expressed recognition of my father, and beamed with smiles immediately.

"Ah ! Mr. Barley—Farley," cried he, "how do you do ? Fine weather this—very warm—bad for trade though, bad for trade. How are the markets to-day—firm ?"

"I don't know. I haven't asked."

"Well, if you'll excuse me I——"

"One moment, Mr. Tackeridge," implored my father, "I am sorry to detain you if you are pressed for time, but I wish to ask when you are going to change that ticket in your window ? It's dragging us all to the workhouse—it's shoving us poorer bakers to the wall and squeezing soul and body out of us. If you would only go up to sevenpence—it's a fair price as flour stands now you know—you would be saving many a man—like me for instance—from bad dreams, bad debts, bad luck altogether."

"Mr. Farley," said Mr. Tackeridge, drawing his arm with a jerk from my father's and towering above him like a giant. "I think the way I regulate my shops is totally my own business, and no one has a right to interfere with it. If I choose to lose twenty or thirty pounds to improve my connection or work off some flour I have purchased cheap, that's still my business, and hurts no one but myself. I can assure you, Mr. Farley," said he, running his hands through his sandy hair, "I have been driven downright mad to-day with the Bethnal Green bakers, and I won't stand it any longer. If I can buy a thousand sacks of flour cheap enough to-day, I'll be hanged if I don't go to fivepence-halfpenny on Monday morning."

"You are a rich man. You cannot feel for such as I am."

"Oh, yes, I can ; oh, yes, I can," replied Tackeridge. "I am doing all this for the good of the parish ; but you do not seem to see it."

"I don't see it," replied my father, emphatically.

"People will come to Bethnal Green to buy their bread," said Mr. Tackeridge, with one of his blue eyes shut from the light of day in a very knowing manner, "Bethnal Green will get the credit of being the best place to buy cheap and good bread in—connection extends—business gets brisk—up we go to sevenpence !"

Mr. Tackeridge did not wait for another word upon the subject, but darted into the Corn Exchange, and was soon shaking hands, right and left, with a score of friends.

Mr. Tackeridge probably made large purchases that afternoon, and gave heavy cheques on his banker for the last week's flour that had been consumed in his dozen dashing shops, and my father went wearily home to Harp Street and to the penny memorandum-books, which were pouring in like hail.

Ah ! fine ladies and fine gentlemen who may in idle hours glance at these pages, do not think lightly of the troubles of my poor old father, or believe that in the business-life of his son there is no story which can interest with its romance, or warn by its example.

There are stories worth the telling in the lives of thousands who live and die far east of Temple Bar—I think mine is one of them, or I would not have resolved to give it to the world. If in the chequered progress of that life some moral may be deduced from its relation—its confessions, the pen has not been taken up in vain.

## CHAPTER III.

## MY FIRST PLACE.

THE Steam Flour-Mills of Messrs. Crawley and Hodkins were situated in Upper Thames Street. They consisted of a massive brick building, standing by the water side—a building full of doors, and traps, and cranes, with something like a large wooden watch-box near the roof.

The paved yard was full of waggons, horses, and dusty carmen, as I made my appearance on the premises of Messrs. Crawley and Hodkins. Every door in the building was open, and sacks of flour were swinging in the air and descending into waggons ; horses were being harnessed and sworn at ; whips were cracking right and left, and men were receiving orders and papers from a clerk seated at an open window of a little brick house near the gates. There was a giant chimney giving out volumes of smoke in rivalry of other chimneys across the river ; and echoing from the mills before me I could hear a constant plunge, rattle, plunge, rattle, indicative of steam-power hard at work within the walls.

I was dressed in a neat dark suit of clothes, which, confidentially, was my Sunday best, and a new hard hat—bought on Saturday night for four and threepence—weighed heavily upon my head. I did not find my gentlemanly appearance attract any particular respect, for whilst looking round in search of Uncle Barchard I was rudely jostled by a white-coated miscreant bent double by a sack of flour, who covered me from head to foot with fine white powder, and knocked my new hat on the stones with a tremendous crash.

Having been accustomed to call occasionally at the mills with messages and small instalments of money from my father, I was at no loss in what manner to proceed upon finding Uncle Barchard absent from the yard. After knocking as much flour out of my Sunday clothes as was possible on the emergency, and carefully examining the condition of my new hat before I replaced it on my head, I crossed to the counting-house window, and, watching my opportunity, made inquiry of the clerk concerning Mr. Barchard.

“He won’t be here this half-hour—what do you want with him ?”

"I am Mr. Barchard's new boy—Master Farley."

"Oh, are you? Then you had better get the horse and chaise ready—here's the key."

The young man unceremoniously flung a key at me, which I took up from the pavement, and attentively regarded. "Here's the key!" What key? He could not mean the key of the horse, or the key of the chaise, he must mean the key of the stables wherein one or another was to be found. After waiting five minutes, during which he distributed more papers to more carmen, I found another chance to speak.

"If you please, Sir, where am I to find the horse and chaise?"

"Bother the boy! what does he come here harassing for? Here Ike, Ike, Ike!"

Ike, a white-smocked nondescript, not quite a man and a few sizes larger than a boy, a bullet-headed, round-shouldered staring individual, the soles of whose boots were four inches thick and made of wood, came clattering across the yard.

"Yes, Mr. Steel," touching his cap.

"This is Mr. Barchard's new boy. Just show him the stables and the way to harness the horse, will you? and—look alive."

"All right, Sir."

"And *look alive!*" repeated Mr. Steel, in a sarcastic manner. "You understand?"

"All right, Sir," replied Ike, a second time.

Ike, beckoning me to follow, tore off across the yard, in and out among the waggons, and under the noses and the nose-bags of the horses, his shoes rattling in clog-hornpipe fashion over the stones. Holding my hat on with both hands, for it was a shade too big for me, I went dodging after Ike, whose rapidity of action and agility under difficulties were certainly remarkable. However, after losing sight of him three times and being nearly run over twice, I caught sight of the flutter of his white smock whisking round an angle of the wall. Rushing full speed towards the object of pursuit, I turned the corner in breathless haste, and was rather startled to find Ike, now Mr. Steel's range of vision was obstructed by the wall, sitting in a heap against a stable door, nursing his knees complacently.

"Well young un?"

The manners and customs of the inhabitants of Harp Street, Bethnal Green, had initiated me into this popular style of address amongst the working classes, and my natural reply was:

"Well, old one?"



"So you are the new boy, are you? Old Barchard's boy? Oh! ain't B. a twister!"

"Is he though?"

"He's one of the strangest old elephants that ever you'll have to put up with in the course of your blessed life, I can tell you."

"I'm sorry for that."

"He horsewhipped the last boy till he couldn't see out of his eyes for making a watch guard out of his mare's tail. My stars, how he did lay on to him!"

The reminiscence of this slight skirmish between Mr. Barchard and my predecessor was too much for Ike's gravity, so rocking himself to-and-fro he enjoyed a hearty laugh.

"You'll catch it soon enough—see if you don't," said Ike, suddenly becoming grave; "you mustn't say your soul's your own, nor your body neither, nor cut up rough if it's ever so bad with you, or the rain comes down ever so hard on that hat."

He stared at my new hat and maintained a stolid cast of countenance, but feeling certain that I was the victim of a solemn species of chaff, I did not reply to his observations.

"You'll wish yourself in Heaven, young un, in a fortnight, if he doesn't send you to it with the butt end of his whip afore that," said Ike, rising from his easy position, taking the key from my hand and unlocking the door of the chaise-house.

"I dare say I shall get used to him in time."

"Here, lend a hand, lazybones," cried Ike, crawling leisurely towards the chaise; "this is old Barchard's turn-out, and in the next crib you'll find the mare. And a stunning mare she is when she is'nt in one of her kicking fits."

"She's a kicker, then?" I inquired, nervously.

"She'll smash the bottom of the shay in in half a minute, if you only vex her or show her a Punch and Judy. And if old Barchard gets out of the gig just a minute, she's off like a shot all along the pavement. The last boy insured his life."

"You don't mean it!"

"And the boy afore that," said he, in a stage whisper, "was thrown out of the gig, and had his head smashed in awful!"

These revelations did not tend to reconcile me to my first place, although I had an idea that the young gentleman before me was prone to exaggeration.

After the chaise had been drawn into the yard by our united efforts, Ike introduced me to the mare, and proceeded to explain, to the best of his ability, the process of harnessing

and unharnessing, at the same time taking great pains to bring his dusty smock as often as possible against my black jacket and trousers.

Whilst thus combining amusement with business in a novel manner peculiar to himself, Ike instructed me in the art of putting Mr. Barchard's horse into the chaise.

"There you are," said he, backing admiringly and drawing my arm in a friendly manner through his own, "there's as neat a turn-out as any gennelman would wish to see—any gennelman, mind you, I don't mean that old Barch—" Mr. Barchard at a slow rate of progression came round the corner. Ike's back was towards him, but catching the reflection of the managing man in the panels of the gig, he took his cue accordingly.

"And as I was a saying, you'll find Mr. Barchard the best-tempered, kindest sort of man, if you'll only behave yourself and be a good boy. Treat him well, young un, and he'll treat *you* well—I can answer for that. There isn't a better—Oh, Mr. Barchard, here you are, and here's the new boy. I've been a talking to him about his duties to you, Sir."

"Be off," said Mr. Barchard, gruffly.

"All right, Sir."

And with this comfortable observation, used by Ike on every occasion—he had caught the habit from his father, who was an omnibus conductor—he touched his hat and ran off in alarming haste.

"You're pretty punctual."

"Yes, uncle."

"You needn't call me uncle, I don't like it."

"Very well, Sir."

"You needn't tell everybody that I am your uncle."

"Very well, Sir."

Mr. Barchard, after stowing a large oilskin bag, ornamented with a little brass lock, underneath the seat of the chaise, climbed in rather an unwieldy manner to his seat, and motioned me to a place by his side.

Mr. Barchard cracked his whip, and at the signal, waggons were drawn aside to let the chaise pass, and teams of horses were unceremoniously huddled to the wall. Ike was very busy in vociferating instructions to the men to get out of Mr. Barchard's way, and touched his hat in a most respectful manner as we drove past him.

We were soon out of Thames Street, and rattling over

Blackfriars Bridge. Being perched in a chaise was a novel sensation to me, and I rather liked it. I should have liked it more had I not screwed myself into too small a compass for the better accommodation of Uncle Barchard's person.

Uncle Barchard, who was a man of more observation than I had imagined, suddenly fixed his eyes on me.

"What are you sitting like that for?" he demanded.

"I was afraid you——"

I stopped. I thought any allusion to the space my Uncle Barchard naturally required might tend to wound his feelings.

"There's plenty of room," said Mr. Barchard, "without your looking as if you'd broken something. Sit up."

I assumed a more life-like position, and Mr. Barchard was silent till he reined in the horse before a baker's shop near Kennington Common.

"Now, your place is to hold the reins and to keep the mare quiet till I come back."

My uncle got out of the chaise, took his large oilskin bag from the box underneath the seat, and waddled into the baker's. A quarter of an hour afterwards he waddled out again, with a lump of money in a corner of the black bag, and away we drove once more.

For one hour Uncle Barchard maintained a rigid silence, and I sat by his side wistfully regarding his severe-looking face, wondering whether he had loved my mother much, and if the heart underneath that wide old-fashioned waistcoat were of a corresponding size to the other portions of his frame—a doubtful point I fancied.

Mr. Barchard's business that day lay with the country bakers, and his day's drive included Norwood, Sydenham, Penge, and Croydon—a pleasant ride to me whose life had been passed in London streets, and who had only once or twice in my short existence seen fields, and trees, and hedgerows—seen them on highdays and holidays, when my father's business was better, and there was no Mr. Tackeridge over the way, to be always "down again."

Not wholly a pleasant ride, for when the novelty had died away, when the fresh breeze from the Surrey hills had brought a tinge of colour to my cheeks, and the Norwood landscapes were less objects of absorbing interest, I began to think of my old father slaving out his life in Harp Street, and to wish that he was enjoying such a ride as mine.

I may say here that although a thoughtful, I was not a

sensitive boy—one easily impressed by trifles. There was a certain depth to bore—a stratum to pierce through—before my heart was touched. The life of indigence at home, the neighbourhood in which I lived, the rough companions at the poor school where I won the Christmas prizes—I have them still !—served to mould my character, and what followed tended not to soften me. I mention this, because my sudden change of life engendered many thoughts that day, and made a girl of me.

Thinking of my father's position in society, and of its contrast with my uncle's, of my uncle's wealth and my father's growing troubles, brought to my eyes a few strange tears, some of which dropped on the wrapper that screened my knees from the wind. I was rather surprised to hear Uncle Barchard say immediately :

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing, Sir."

"Do you generally cry for nothing?"

"I wasn't crying," I answered quickly, "I only felt the water come into my eyes—just a little—I was thinking of my father."

"Is he not well?"

"Far from well, Sir. He works too hard."

Uncle Barchard was getting conversational, for he went on :

"Hard at the business, you mean?"

"Yes. He only keeps a boy of seventeen in the bakehouse. He does nearly all the work himself—he works all day and then he is up again at three in the morning to set the batch of bread for the early customers—my father works very hard indeed, Sir. And then there's that Tackeridge to worry him."

I ran on, very full of my father's cares, and although Mr. Barchard looked straight before him down the dusty country road, bordered by the sturdy elms whose branches touched overhead and made a rustling green canopy, yet I was quick enough to detect a listener.

"And that Tackeridge, Sir," said I, indignantly, "he makes things worse by going down to sixpence and selling under awfully, and giving bumping weight with every loaf, and—so he goes it."

We drove into a little village and drew up before another baker's shop. It was nearly twelve o'clock, and the oilskin bag was getting heavy. Mr. Barchard had a slight dispute with the owner of this rustic shop—which I only wished was my father's—and as I sat in the chaise whipping some trouble-

some flies off the horse's back, I could hear high words in the back parlour, and my uncle grumbling because there was no money forthcoming for Messrs. Crawley and Hodkins.

Mr. Barchard resumed his place by my side after the warm discussion with the country baker, and did not appear to be greatly disturbed in temper when we were fairly off again. I believe that he would have maintained the same expressionless cast of countenance under any circumstances—at a wedding or a funeral, in his brightest day of prosperity or in a court of bankruptcy, and I believe, moreover, that that face was an index to the dogged, determined nature, which had led him step by step to the position he then held.

To my surprise Mr. Barchard first broke silence.

"Your father has a trouble in making things square, I suppose, boy?"

"Square, Sir?"

"In paying up to the mark?" he exclaimed, in a gruff voice.

"Oh! yes, Sir—always."

Young to the world and unsuspecting, flattered by Uncle Barchard's notice, I forgot the respect due to my father's business matters.

"Does he deal with any millers besides Crawley and Hodkins?"

"One, Sir."

"Who's that?"

"Mr. Markham, of Greenwich."

"Does he pay him regularly?"

"I think so, Sir. Mr. Markham calls very regularly, at all events."

A grim twitch of the mouth which might be taken for a suppressed smile or not, according to the beholder's powers of fancy, altered for a moment the countenance of Messrs. Crawley and Hodkins's collector.

Mr. Barchard continued to talk, much to my inward satisfaction. I felt that I should like the heavy gentleman when I got thoroughly used to him.

"Then you don't think your father's saving money?"

"Losing, Sir. Fast."

Mr. Barchard took a note-book from his breast-pocket and turned over several pages.

"Thirty sacks at fifty-seven shillings, net," he muttered.

"Sir?"

"I was not speaking to you," was the short reply, as he

replaced the book in his pocket after a slight hurried scratching with a lead pencil on the page to which he had referred.

I was puzzled at his manner then—it was not long before I fully understood it.

“Do you know how many sacks your father bakes a week, Philip Farley?”

“Nine, Sir—sometimes ten.”

“Bad. That woman—your mother I mean—seems a good hand at business. Is she?”

“She’s very sharp with the customers, Mr. Barchard, especially with those who want trust.”

“Then she ought to keep the business together.”

“But that Tackeridge, Sir.”

“Ah!—yes.”

“Father says Tackeridge will ruin him if he doesn’t go up to sevenpence.”

“Sevenpence is only a fair price,” commented Mr. Barchard.

A long pause, during which we were approaching Croydon.

Mr. Barchard, less taciturn than myself, began again.

“How old did you say you were?”

“Going on for thirteen.”

“How old were you when Ellen—when your mother died?”

“Five, Sir.”

“Ah!”

Mr. Barchard spoke no more till we had entered Croydon town and stopped at a large commercial inn. When we had alighted and Mr. Barchard had prudently removed his oilskin bag, an ostler and stable boy emerged from a side yard and proceeded to make off with the horse and chaise.

An hour’s rest—Mr. Barchard in a private room, where he got through a hurried lunch, wrote half-a-dozen letters, and read the money article in the *Times*, and myself in a kind of coffee-room with half a pint of ale and some bread and cheese which I had brought from Harp Street.

When we were in the chaise again my uncle handed me a letter, saying:

“Put that in your pocket, boy.”

“For me, Sir?”

“For your father.”

I coloured; I felt that the letter had something to do with my communications before dinner on the Croydon road. I began to have less confidence in Uncle Barchard too. I did not understand him.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, after some delays at Streatham, we approached the vicinity of Brixton Hill, where the wholesalers retreat after business hours to fancy residences of every order and disorder of architecture, where the boarding-schools are numerous, where the Reformatory shields the erring and unfortunate, where the great prison is. Farther down the hill, a villa of smaller dimensions than those we had lately passed, asserted its right to public notice; a villa brilliant with fresh paint and plate-glass windows, and emerald-green Venetian blinds. There was a narrow circular walk leading to the house that might, by a liberty of speech, be termed a carriage-drive, and Mr. Barchard whirled recklessly along it, damaging the box-edging to a considerable extent, and reined in his horse before a portico, which as an entrance to Covent Garden Theatre might have been a trifle more proportionate.

I caught sight of "Wheatsheaf Villa," written on the entrance gates, and on the brass door-plate, which was fiery in the sun, I read the name of "Tackeridge."

"Does he live here?" I cried out.

"Who?"

"Tackeridge, the baker."

"Don't ask questions," snubbed my uncle; "it's no business of yours."

My uncle descended, oilskin bag in hand, and walked to the street door. After a lively summons on the knocker the door was opened by an ugly little page, whose tight-fitting jacket was the envy of every boy in Brixton, it had so many buttons.

Fresh theme for thought when the door had closed and I was shut out in the hot sun. So that was Mr. Tackeridge's residence—there the man planned his schemes for making his dozen shops pay a fair per-centage, for puffing off his name in London streets, for troubling the souls of other bakers by going down again—that man, the evil genius of my father!

"What does he care about his neighbour in Harp Street, Bethnal Green, when he comes here night after night?" I thought; "what has he done to rise thus in the world, and be able to live like a gentleman, while my father pines his life away in the stifling East-end streets? Oh! to know the secret of this man's success and see my father getting rich, what would I give—what would I give!"

God forgive me for the evil that lay at my boy's heart that day, the covetousness with which I envied other men's goods,

the dark thoughts which were clouding me as I sat before the house of him who had brought misfortune on my father's head, —sat there wishing that my father was a rich man, and Tackeridge a poor shopkeeper tortured by continual opposition from over the way!

My thoughts were suddenly dispelled by a voice which seemed issuing like a gnome's from the bright red gravel. It was a low, sweet, musical voice, and, after a slight start, I leaned from the chaise to look for the owner of it.

Standing on tiptoe, with two tiny gloved hands resting fearlessly on the spokes of the wheel, and two tiny feet in imminent danger of being crushed if the wheel but made half a revolution, was a fair-haired little girl of eleven years of age. She had stolen round from the side gate to satisfy her curiosity respecting the visitor to Wheatsheaf Villa. A fair-haired, pretty child, with a Tackeridge expression on her face, which was shaded by a large straw garden-hat, decorated with blue ribbons. There was a display of finery in the child's dress which could have been dispensed with to advantage, the rich material, gay colours, and fashionable cut, making too much of a lady of her.

"Has Master Esden come, my lad?"

"Who, Miss?" I asked.

"Master Esden; E—s—es—d—e—n—den—Esden."

"I really don't know, Miss—Miss Tackeridge—I didn't bring him."

"How did you know my name was Tackeridge?" asked the young lady, in rather a peremptory manner.

"I thought it might be—that's all, Miss."

I was disconcerted by the first young lady whom I had seen in my life, and with a face as red as the geraniums in the centre bed on the small grass-plot, I kept dropping my reins and picking them up again, in a very nervous manner.

"My governess tells me never to express an opinion when I am not positive as to its correctness."

"Does she, Mum?"

"Who's in the house with my pa, then, boy, if Master Esden has not come?"

"Mr. Barchard, Miss."

"Has Mr. Barchard come to take away a lot more money of my pa's in that nasty shiny bag of his?"

"I think it's very likely, Miss Tackeridge."



"Annie, Annie, come away do!" cried a voice from the side gate.

Annie, although she must have distinctly heard the request, took not the slightest notice of it, but continued her examination of the embarrassed Master Farley.

"You're a new boy, are you not?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Annie," repeated the voice from the side gate, "do you not hear me speaking? Come away, I *insist*."

"What did the other boy leave for?" Miss Tackeridge asked, curiously.

"I—I think there's some one calling you, Miss."

"Oh! it's only Miss Mackintosh."

Miss Mackintosh, losing all patience, bounced from the side gate and made a dash at Annie. Miss Mackintosh was a small body with a blue sunshade to her bonnet and blue mittens to her hands—a thin-faced, faded lady of an uncertain age.

Miss Mackintosh, with surprising volubility, opened fire on the small offender.

"How dare you behave in this manner, you naughty child, and leave the summer-house and your reading-lesson without even asking leave? I shall report this conduct to your papa and mamma immediately, who, I trust, will severely reprimand you for so gross and unbecoming a behaviour. Please to return to the garden, directly, Miss Tackeridge."

"Well, I'm sure!"

The freezing look bestowed on Miss Mackintosh staggered the lady with the blue mittens, though she made a second attempt to assert her authority.

"Take your gloves off that muddy wheel, do, Miss T.—I'm ashamed of you, I am indeed! Good gracious, if the wheel was to go round, you would be crushed to atoms!"

"Miss Mackintosh," observed the young lady, without changing her position, "I shall feel obliged by your not making a scene here for the amusement of this lad."

"Oh! you naughty girl, oh! you wicked girl," gasped forth Miss Mackintosh, "oh! my goodness gracious, I will tell your pa directly—I will indeed."

Miss Mackintosh trotted back to the garden gate and disappeared. Miss Tackeridge looked up at me with a half smile.

"I don't think she'll tell my pa, and if she does my papa will

only laugh, and mamma will say that I shall know better by-and-bye, and so that is all the harm Miss Mackintosh will do me."

The window to the left of the portico was that instant violently thrown up, and Mr. Tackeridge's sandy head appeared between the damask curtains.

"Annie, go in."

Annie, biting her lip, still maintained her ground.

"Annie!" shouted Mr. Tackeridge, "will you go in?"

Annie wavered, turned pale, murmured, "Yes, pa," and releasing her hold of the wheel, walked slowly and majestically to the garden gate, which a moment afterwards banged violently, and frightened the horse.

Whilst I was tightening the reins with difficulty, Mr. Barchard was let out at the front door of Wheatsheaf Villa. Mr. Tackeridge, with his hands jingling some money in his trousers' pockets, took his place on the threshold.

When Mr. Barchard was in the chaise, Mr. Tackeridge called out:

"Better say fifty-five shillings again?"

"Can't do it, Mr. Tackeridge."

"I'll make it five hundred sacks."

Mr. Barchard shook his head against temptation.

"You won't?"

"I can't."

"Good-day, then."

"Good-day, Sir."

Mr. Barchard's chaise was half way round the carriage-drive when the voice of Mr. Tackeridge hailed him from beneath the portico.

"Fifty-five and six, then. I suppose I must have them."

Mr. Barchard took his note-book out, and registered the order.

"How many shall we say?"

"Three hundred—and, Mr. Barchard—"

"Sir."

"Send fifty to Harp Street as soon as possible—we're rather busy there."

I did not doubt it—no one else was busy in Bethnal Green excepting Mr. Tackeridge.

"Fifty—to—Harp—Street—soon—as—possible," repeated Mr. Barchard to his note-book. "Thank you."

A reiteration of "good-days," and we were off again.

At the gate a tall lad, three or four years my senior, stood waiting for the chaise to pass. A handsome, dark-haired, dark-eyed stripling, who nodded with an easy grace to Mr. Barchard.

"How do you do, Sir?"

"Ah! Master Esden, how are you?"

"Very well, I thank you."

So that was Master Esden, concerning whom Annie Tackeridge had been anxious. I glanced at him curiously, wondering who Master Esden was, and whether his father was a baker—a baker always going "down again," and consequently a bosom friend of Mr. Tackeridge.

"What did Miss Tackeridge want with you, boy?" asked Mr. Barchard, as we drove along the Brixton Road.


I related the particulars.

"Ah! rather obstinate," he muttered. "I've got a little girl at home about her age—not her temper, though."

I had heard my father speak of Mr. Barchard's wife, and knew that she had died a few years back. I had heard something about his child too, once or twice, but neither my father nor I had ever set eyes on Mr. Barchard's daughter. I speculated as to the personal appearance of Miss Barchard the remainder of the ride home to Upper Thames Street—if she were a nice girl—if she were anything like Miss Tackeridge, who looked so pretty in her garden hat? No, no, not like Miss Tackeridge, but very like her father—she must be a fat, oversized child, with a bull-neck and popping-out eyes—a disagreeable, taciturn child, whom nobody could love. As we passed through the gates leading to Messrs. Crawley and Hodkins's steam flour-mills, the yard was in its last stage of bustle, and the sun was setting behind the pile of house-roof. Empty waggons were coming in, tired horses and jaded carters were every instant turning round the corner, the day's labour, for the majority of workers, was nearly at an end. There would be a stray waggon, with horses and carters a shade degree more weary and jaded, coming in some hours hence, but there was rest for most of Messrs. Crawley and Hodkins's servants at eight o'clock at night. Yet life and labour in the mill and its vicinity never wholly slept; the watchman in the yard was up all night, the lights were ever burning in the mill, and the plunge, rattle, plunge, rattle, of the engines went on unceasingly.

Ike, the industrious, came running to receive the chaise;

never was a boy, to all appearances, more prompt and willing. Mr. Barchard descended and proceeded to carry his oilskin bag into the counting-house, telling me that I could go home as soon as I pleased—and that I was not to be later than half-past eight next morning, and that I was not to forget his letter to my father.



## CHAPTER IV

## MR. BARCHARD'S LETTER.

I WAS anxious to get back to Harp Street, but Ike was very talkative and rich in anecdote, and there was no escaping his attentions. It was a happy release to get free at last, and hurry on my way. I had a long walk before me ; I was tired, cramped, and thirsty ; I wanted my tea in the little back parlour of the Harp Street shop—I wanted to relate my first experience in life to those who were looking forward to my coming home. I ran and walked briskly along, carrying my hat under my arm for ease and comfort. Everybody seemed going home too, and glad to get there, except the cabmen and policemen. The roofs of suburban-bound omnibuses swarmed with city clerks—messengers, porters, work-girls from the factories, and day-labourers with tool-baskets at their backs crossed and recrossed each other—busy bees in the great hive—all eager for home and rest.

I was hastening down Bishopsgate Street, and had just placed my hat on my head to relieve my hands a moment, when that hat was saluted with a bang of two or three horsepower, which shut me in with the lining, and out from the light of day.

With a considerable amount of effort and wild contortion I got from beneath my hat and looked indignantly around me. There was the object of my first suspicions laughing immoderately at his successful onslaught, holding against a post to maintain his equilibrium, the hobbledehoy being known in Upper Thames Street by the name of Ike.

“Don't do that again, you Sir !” I exclaimed.

“It's only my lark.”

“Then lark with your own property,” replied I, “or I'm

blowed"—(a verb very fashionable Bethnal Green way)—"if I don't tell Mr. Barchard."

"I'm blowed if I care about old Barchard," said Ike, releasing his hold of the post and strutting on by my side, "he's nothing to do with me. If he comes any bounce over me I'll split his head open, and so I tell him."

"What are you following me for?"

"I live this way—Choke Street, Shoreditch—where do you live?"

"Bethnal Green."

"Oh! that's in my way too. Come along—don't I want my tea, oh! no, not at all. Only half a gallon of the best gunpowder set to simmer on the hob, and get strong enough to knock me back'ards. How many slices of bread-and-butter can you eat?"

"I never tried."

"You should see me—it's worth your while, I can tell you."

Ike was always telling somebody a grave and important fact which nobody cared to know. I was particularly reserved towards him that evening, and did not join very readily in conversation, my feelings and my four-and-threepenny hat having been seriously hurt. There never was a more troublesome, restless creature of seventeen than the individual by my side, never one consumed with a more insatiable curiosity, or a more uncontrollable desire to interfere with everything and everybody in his way. Ike wanted to know that evening and on that instant who was my father, what he was, whether he had any more "young uns," whether he had a good business in Harp Street, how long he had been in the neighbourhood, and whether he was in the habit of regularly paying his water rate? To do him justice, he was equally communicative; "his father was a 'bus-conductor, whose name was Boxham, and his mother wasn't alive, but his sister was, and she took in mangling and went out 'chairing,' and his other sister Jenny was a cripple and walked so"—he gave a life-like description of his sister's infirmity, for fifty yards down Bishopsgate Street—"and his eldest brother was a soldier—at least, everybody thought so, for he ran away from home when he was fourteen years of age, and had not been heard of since." Ike Boxham varied these particulars by annoying all the small boys on the queen's highway, snatching off their caps, or pulling savagely at their infantine ears, and by aggravating elderly fruit women at the

corners of the streets with minute inquiries concerning the current price of apples. As for the shops he stopped at—dragging me to the window for mutual inspection and criticism—they are not to be enumerated.

I was truly thankful when our roads lay in opposite directions and it was time to part with Ike. He was anxious to accompany me home, and work his way back to Shoreditch through several choice "slums" with which he was acquainted, but I put a decided negative on the offer and he did not press the favour urgently. After inquiring whether half-past five o'clock next morning was too early "to give me a knock-up," and regretting that he could not make it later unless he risked "the sack," he took his departure in the middle of the road, among the carts and omnibuses.

I found my father lighting the gas in the Harp Street shop, and my stepmother in the parlour with a Mont Blanc of stockings and "white work" on the table.

There were no kisses or friendly embraces in my family—we were all matter-of-fact people, and had not time to be affectionate. I took my seat by the yawning fire-place with a "Ain't I tired," and my stepmother said, "So you've come, Phil,—how late you are."

After the gas was lighted, my father, in his worn slippers, came shuffling into the parlour.

"How do you like your place, my boy?" he asked.

"It's rather nice the riding part of it, and rather nasty sitting so long, father," I replied; "but how's Tackeridge—he hasn't gone down again, I hope?"

"No—he's still at sixpence, Philip," answered he; "and what do you think of Mr. Barchard?"

"He's rough at times, but I think it's only his way."

"Ah! it is only his way, Philip. I used to think that he was a very good sort of man once. Mary, where's Philip's tea?"

The tea was simmering at the oven's mouth by the side of several dozens of sheeps'-heads, the property of a tripe and trotter merchant, a few doors off, who came out strong in luxuries every evening at nine.

After the hot tea and several slices of thick bread-and-butter had been disposed of, I related to my father and mother the full particulars of the first day in my new place, of the long country ride I had had in Mr. Barchard's chaise, of the Surrey landscapes far away from Bethnal Green, where the air was

less thick and heavy, where the trees, and fields, and birds were, where labour under the blue vault of heaven seemed something different and more holy to the toil that never ended in the streets and alleys of the poor. I enlarged on the country-house of Mr. Tackeridge, and of his daughter, who wore a lilac silk dress and a garden-hat trimmed with blue ribbon, and "was the prettiest girl, mother, that I ever saw in my life!" I spoke of everything but the letter, which I omitted to deliver until I was going up to bed.

"Oh! here's something Mr. Barchard wished me to give you, father. I had nearly forgotten it."

"What is it?"

"A letter."

"A letter," repeated my father, turning pale as he took Mr. Barchard's missive from my hands; "a letter, eh!—I wonder now what it can be about!"

I do not think that he wondered much—he passed his large-veined hand over his damp forehead once or twice, as if the grey hairs were straggling too near his eyes, and then sat down on the chair from which I had arisen, and pushed the letter across the table to my mother.

"Perhaps you will read it, Mary."

Mary opened the letter, cleared her throat, and read slowly, almost painfully, the following:—

"DEAR SIR,

"I am desired by Messrs. Crawley and Hodkins to close your account with them as soon as possible. The very low and unprofitable rate at which bread is sold in Bethnal Green compels them to decline transacting further business with the majority of bakers in that neighbourhood. I have to offer Messrs. C. and H's grateful thanks for your long and honourable transactions with their firm, and to subscribe myself

"Your obedient servant,

"WILLIAM BARCHARD.

"Mr. FARLEY, Baker,

"54, Harp Street, Bethnal Green."

I felt the blood rushing to my cheeks. I remembered the many questions and the foolish answers concerning my father's trade that morning in the chaise—I had done it all!—I had brought that look of trouble and shame on my father's wrinkled face!

"Read it again, Mary, if you please."

"Isn't once enough?" she asked, gloomily.

"If you please, I hardly understand it."

"Plain as can be—ugh," said Mrs. Farley, "plain and civil, and hard as he who wrote it. Yet you married this man's sister!"

"I don't think he forgets that."

"Does he esteem you for it?"

My stepmother was getting angry.

"I can't say—I always esteemed William Barchard, he is a man of common sense."

"Ah! that's better than a man of common feeling!"

"So I think, my dear," replied my father, gravely; "now will you read that letter once more, please?"

My stepmother read it.

"He's afraid that I shall get in his debt," said my father; "or not be able to pay his employers—well, well, well, it's his duty, and he is in the right—I don't respect him less for that, Mary."

Mary did not answer.

"I might have done the same myself if I had been in his place."

"No you wouldn't," cried my stepmother; "if you had been as rich as he, and he as poor as you, you would have spoken up for him to your masters, and have helped him for the sake of past relationship."

"I might, Mary—but as that is not the case we may as well dismiss it. It will come rather heavy on us," continued my father; "I have been keeping up a good name on Crawley and Hodkins's books, and letting Markham's account run back a little—I don't know how it will end—I can't think."

He dropped his head upon the hard deal table, and let it rest there as if he were asleep. My stepmother looked at him, dashed one angry tear from her eye with a violence that must have hurt her, and turned round to me, standing by the door which opened on the staircase.

"Why don't you go to bed? What are you standing there for?"

"I did it," was my answer.

"Did what?"

"I told Mr. Barchard how poor my father was, and how hard he found it to get a living here. I answered all his



questions about the flour, the bread, the price—the man was mean enough to ask me everything !”

“Never mind,” answered my father, “what does it matter ? Sooner or later it must have happened as it is—go to bed, boy—good-night.”

“We must do our best,” said his wife ; “if best is worse, still we will do it honestly—won’t we, Farley ?”

“Please God, please God.”

“You and I have seen these little storms before, you know.”

“Not quite so large, but something like them, eh ?” said my father, looking up a moment.

“Exactly like them,” said my stepmother. “Lor ! it’s only putting the shoulder to the wheel again. We must not think of keeping those silver spoons of your grandfather’s by us any longer—and Philip must teach himself instead of going to evening-school—he’s a clever boy, you know—and perhaps Tackeridge will soon go up to sevenpence.”

“Very likely—perhaps to-morrow !”

So this strange couple—but husband and wife in the best sense of the words—talked of the better days which, in their secretly-despairing hearts, they knew could never come by any exertion of their own, and by their empty words of consolation sought to brace each other’s nerves for that terrible battle which was going on in a hundred homes around them as well as at No. 54, Harp Street, Bethnal Green.

I went to bed with an angry beating at the heart, and with a very mean opinion of my Uncle Barchard.

No, I should never esteem him,—two-faced, undermining, hypocritical uncle—I must hate him for ever and ever.

I soon fell into a slumber, which was disturbed throughout the night by visions of the day that had gone—by figures that kept flitting backwards and forwards with their faces close to mine. Grave Uncle Barchard with Annie Tackeridge laughing over his shoulder at Master Esden in the foreground. My father and my stepmother tearing Tackeridge the Great to pieces, and Ike Boxham executing a savage dance over the fragments on the floor. Throughout the night these people seemed to flit before me, to-and-fro, approaching and receding—figures which were not to vanish into dream-land, but were to come into the daylight of my after-life, and march beside me there.

## CHAPTER V.

## A CALL AT HARP STREET.

THE very poor opinion I had arrived at concerning Mr. William Barchard remained the same on the following morning when I woke up from my disturbed dream of yesterday's faces. He was not a gentleman in the first place, he was far from a noble uncle in the second, and he had taken a mean advantage of my position as his boy in the third. If Uncle Barchard thought to entrap me again into any confessions calculated to affect father, mother, myself, even Ike Boxham, he was considerably mistaken.

I started for Upper Thames Street that morning with a set determination to be totally ignorant on every subject which my mysterious employer might start in the course of the day's drive.

I was suffering from depression when I reached Upper Thames Street, and Ike Boxham's flow of humour was more than usually offensive.

He appeared to arrive at the same conclusion after indulging in a series of practical jokes which failed to elicit a smile from me, and inquired :

"If the guv'nor had been pegging into me that morning?"

"No, he hasn't."

"What's the row, then?"

"Nothing."

"Yes, there is."

"No, there isn't."

"You're a liar."

"You're another."

After this smart interchange of civilities, Ike stalked sulkily away, leaving me to manage the horse and chaise in the best manner that I could. Not being quite expert yet in my duties as Mr. Barchard's boy, my uncle found me fumbling over straps and buckles upon his arrival in the yard.

"Have you not finished yet? Where's Ike?"

"I don't know, Sir."

I had made up my mind not to know anything.

Mr. Barchard put his hand to his mouth with the intention of rousing the echoes of the yard with shouts of Ike, but

thinking better of it, having a slight knowledge of the idiosyncracies of Master Boxham, he took the harness from my hands and adjusted it in proper fashion with a dexterity worthy of a conjuror.

Our route that day was not so picturesque or interesting as that of the preceding,—no country-roads fringed by bright green hedgerows, nothing but muddy streets and lanes, broad thoroughfares and narrow ones, round Tooley Street and Dock-head way ; in Bermondsey among the tanpits and curriers ; in the noisy Borough, and the maze of turnings about Lambeth, the New Cut, and Westminster Road, and back again at an earlier hour of the evening to Messrs. Crawley and Hodkins's mills.

The oilskin bag was heavier than yesterday, the London bakers drove a brisker trade than country ones, and had harder work to do. We came upon one or two shops over whose dazzling plate-glass fronts was inscribed the name of Tackeridge, and "DOWN AGAIN," in very large capitals, attracted the attention of the British public from those grand *dépôts* for bread.

Mr. Barchard did not indulge much in conversation during the day, he was absorbed in business and kept constantly referring to his note-book. However, one question was :

"Did you give your father my letter ?"

"Yes, Sir."

"What did he say ?"

"Don't know, Sir."

Mr. Barchard turned round, and looked me sharply in the face for an instant, but put no further questions to me till the afternoon of the same day, when he broke forth with :

"Is your father back in his rent ?"

"Don't know, Sir."

"Has Markham, the miller, called at Harp Street lately ?"

"Don't know, Sir."

"I wonder what he owes Markham," mused he.

"I don't know, Sir, myself."

"Who said you did ?" grunted Uncle Barchard. Those were his last words that day, and I went home to Bethnal Green with the satisfaction of not having committed myself. Having started at an earlier hour from the mills, I was relieved from the attentions of Ike Boxham, whose work did not cease till eight o'clock in the evening. I found everything going on as usual at No. 54, and Mr. Tackeridge's 6d. still occupying the centre pane of the shop over the way.

Day after day passed by in my new place; I became accustomed to Uncle Barchard's manner, but did not alter that opinion of him which I had formed after our first ride together over the Surrey hills. There were four days devoted to driving round London and lurking about Mark Lane, and two days to the suburbs; always in the Norwood and Croydon route, stopping at Wheatsheaf Villa, Brixton Hill; always Uncle Barchard and Mr. Tackeridge on the most friendly terms, but nothing more of Annie, the self-willed, to be seen. Out in all weathers, sun, and wind, and rain, and getting hardened to them all, my skin becoming rather brown, and my hat, at four and threepence, browner.

The days lengthened into weeks, the weeks to months; the summer died away, the autumn came and died away too, the dreary winter broke in upon us with an early fall of snow, and I was still Mr. Barchard's boy.

Trade had been variable in Harp Street, and there was no fixing Mr. Tackeridge. High prices and low prices; one day Mr. Tackeridge making a profit on his bread and letting others do the same; the next, a host of flaring bills, all "DOWN AGAIN," of course, and full of "GLORIOUS NEWS!" If Mr. Tackeridge had been assassinated one dark night in the act of stepping into his gig by a secret member of the baker's Vehmgericht, I should not have been surprised; and I do not think the trade in general would have worn much black crape in consequence. In the winter time my father's business grew worse, and his customers required more trust than ever. My stepmother strove hard to keep the little trade together, but Mr. Markham, of Greenwich, made out heavy bills, and some grasping flour-factors had spun a net around my father, through which no efforts of the Farley family could break. A business, half carried on by trust, a quarter's rent in arrear, with a needy landlord harassing daily; a series of debts on millers' and factors' books; a lively opposition over the way, no wonder my father's face showed deeper lines or that his hair turned a lighter grey.

One evening in the beginning of December, No. 54, Harp Street was surprised by an unexpected visitor. I was in the back parlour, working out elaborate sums in arithmetic for instruction and amusement—I could find amusement in the study of figures—when a well-known voice in the shop startled me.

"I say, is your name Farley?"

"Yes, that is my name," replied my father. "What do you want, my lad?"

I left my slate and pencil and looked through the parlour window—Ike Boxham, as I anticipated. What ever could he want?

"You've got a boy who waits on old—on Mr. Barchard, ain't you?"

"Yes, I have," said my alarmed father; "has he done anything?"

"Oh, no."

Ike had a secret to communicate, and was very important with it.

"Well, what of my Philip—do you know anything against him?"

"I should rather say I did—almost enough to hang him, but I haven't come to call him over the coals just yet. I've come to give you a warning, master, that's all."

"A warning?"

"Yes. Shall I go into that 'ere room there?"

"If you like."

Ike slouched towards the room, opened the door, and went down the steps into the parlour.

My stepmother was sitting at the end of the table opposite the door, and Ike, rather abashed at the presence of a female, took off his cap, muttered "Good evening, mum," and seemed half inclined to back into the shop again.

"Well Ike," said I, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing particular, but I thought I'd come and tell your father."

"Sit down," said my father, who had followed Master Boxham.

"Thank'ee."

Ike sat down on the extreme edge of the chair, and took a survey of the dimensions of the room, and became particularly interested in some small ornaments on the mantelpiece, on which he fixed his eyes with a steadfast gaze, that no coughing or shuffling of my father's feet could induce him to withdraw.

A silence ensued. The Dutch clock in the corner ticked audibly, and Ike sat and snorted in a painful manner.

Suddenly, and without the slightest introduction, Ike, with a fixed gaze at the chimney ornaments, dashed into the subject which had brought him to Shoreditch.

"As I was in the yard this morning, after old—after Mr. Barchard had gone out with the shay, the guv'nor himself—that's Mr. Crawley—came to look about the place, as he does sometimes, you know. There was another gennelman with him, and they got a-talking about their bad debts, and I heerd the strange gennelman ask if as how Mr. Crawley had Farley, of Harp Street, on his books. 'Off long ago,' says the guv'nor, 'thanks to Mr. Barchard.' 'I'm afraid I shall lose money in that quarter,' says the t'other, 'but I've given orders to put a stop to it, at last—Farley'll be shut up in another week, or my name isn't Markham.' And then they went on talking about sumfink else."

"Markham—Markham, eh?—well, it can't be helped," murmured my father; "I haven't got the money or the means, and he must make a bankrupt of me. What else can I expect?"

"I thought I'd come and tell you," remarked Ike, shifting his eyes towards my father at last.

"Thank you—thank you."

"I thought if I was you," said Ike, in a confidential whisper of the huskiest description, "and could conveniently manage to make a bolt of it—say to-night—there's a chance of doing it that doesn't often happen."

My father shook his head.

"If you could start with a wan about two o'clock this morning, and tip the policeman half-a-crown to see nothink, you'd get the pull of Markham, wouldn't you?"

"Not I, not I," exclaimed my father.

"My father often does it, I can tell you," remarked Ike Boxham, anxious to afford every encouragement and example, "he's obliged to do it or he'd lose every stick of furniture, and go to the dogs in no time."

"I would rather go to the dogs than run away."

"Oh, would I though!" remarked Ike.

"You heard all this in the yard?" inquired my step-mother.

"Yes, mum," replied Ike, looking intently into his cap. "You see the yard was pretty empty—all the waggons but one had gone out with their fust loads, and I was attending to the last lot. Catching the name of Farley, and knowing *him*, you see," indicating me by a jerk of his head, "it made me curious."

"And you listened?"

"I heerd every word, mum," said Ike, proudly.

"I am very much obliged to you for taking all this trouble," said my father, "for preparing me a bit against the shock. Your advice is kindly meant, my lad, but old Farley has not lived with a good name in the parish thirty years to blacken it the thirty-first."

"Well, I thought I'd come," said Ike, getting off the sharp edge of the chair; "you know best your own affairs, of course. It's nothink to do with me, Mister Farley, but if I wos you and you wos Ike, I should be found 'steriously absent in the morning, and so I tell you." And with this oration—rather high-flown for Ike—the youth took his departure.

When he had gone my father said :

"'Twas kind of him to bring the warning. I shall now be prepared"—with a sickly smile—"to be tapped on the shoulder by a bailiff the first time I set foot out of doors. Mary, my dear, we must give up struggling now—there's nothing to be done! The writs will come, the brokers, the men in possession—I shall go to the Queen's Bench, and you must get a situation as shopwoman or barmaid somewhere—not a barmaid's if you can help it, it's a place I shouldn't care to see you in again, Mary. Philip, boy, take the sixpenny ticket out of the window, and call Jack to put the shutters up. Never to take them down any more though—oh dear! never to take them down any more!"

My father burst into a childish fit of crying, dropped into the arm-chair by the parlour door and rocked himself to-and-fro in an excited manner.

"I knew it would come to this some day," sobbed he, "I knew that it was only putting off the evil hour, and I thought I had prepared for everything. But no, no, no, I hadn't. I'm a ruined man—a ru—ru—ruined man!"

I did not cry myself, I sat scratching idle figures on the slate, and taking courage from my stepmother, who sat with her brow knit somewhat, but with no trace of emotion on her good-looking face; she was surveying fate before her, and her bold heart did not sink much. A customer entered the shop, and she went up the parlour-step and served him, talked of the weather and the early date at which the winter had set in, and came back to my father's side again.

"Philip Farley," said she to him, laying her large hand on his shoulder, "you say there's nothing to be done, and we must give up struggling for a livelihood. I shall never give up

while I have you and that boy to care for, and while I have hands to help the two of you. They may take this shop away from us—they may, which God forbid, put you in prison for our debts—but there will be greater need than ever for me to work somehow and somewhere.”

“It don’t seem right that you should do it.”

“I took you for better for worse.”

“And worse it is !”

“The best can be made of the worst, Farley, when the will is strong and the heart is willing.”

“Mary,” said my father, jumping to his feet, “you’re worth your weight in gold. Thank’ee, my dear, thank’ee, I feel much better now !”



## CHAPTER VI.

### ANOTHER CALL

DEPRESSED and gloomy, I set out the following morning for the steam flour mills in Upper Thames Street. I left all quiet in Harp Street ; Tackeridge, over the way, was driving a brisk trade, and although the sword was hanging by a hair from No. 54, Damocles stood prepared behind the counter, and did not fear the hook-nosed child of Israel who might be waiting in the adjoining street.

So low spirited was I in the chaise by the side of Mr. Barchard, that even that gentleman remarked my fit of moodiness, and inquired the cause. He did not inquire in a feeling manner, but with a grunt like a pig.

“What’s the matter at home ?”

“Eh, Sir.”

“What’s the matter at home ?”

Remembering the first ride with my interlocutor, I was quickly on my guard.

“Don’t know, Sir.”

“Yes you do,” snapped Mr. Barchard, “and it’s no good ‘don’t knowing’ me. Now, what is it ?”

I did not answer readily, and he said :

“Your father is in difficulties—of course he is. There’s a writ out, perhaps, nothing more likely.”



"I don't know that there is a writ out, Sir."

"Do you mean to tell me there's nothing wrong at Harp Street?"

He looked me full in the face and there was no help for the confession. It could do no further harm to my father, so I answered:—

"I'm afraid there is something very wrong."

"What is it?"

"My father thinks that he'll be taken away to prison."

"A very good place too," remarked Uncle Barchard, "he'll be out of harm's way there. I can't see what good he is doing or will ever do in Bethnal Green. Your father's a regular fool for business."

This was a long speech for Mr. Barchard, and I fancied that he was excited. Not that he showed any excitement—not that that fat grim face ever gave evidence of what was passing in his mind, or leaving an impression there.

Uncle Barchard questioned me no further—he spoke no more all that day, he was too busy collecting money and orders from West End bakers. It was a long day's work, and we did not arrive at Upper Thames Street till a late hour of the evening.

I ran all the way home to Harp Street, pausing but to collect breath for fresh starts, and then setting off again. I saw nothing of Ike Boxham, he had been gone three quarters of an hour, and there was no one to delay my rapid progress, save a few dawdling people whom I ran against, and a few stray children who came in my way and were knocked down.

My heart beat very fast—more with suspense than my late exertions—as I finally reached Harp Street and ran panting into the shop. Had my father been taken away that morning?—taken away to the prison where the high black walls and iron spikes would keep him in for ever!

Thank God! he was at home, sitting by the fire in his baker's dress, with his slippered feet on the fender.

"You're very late to-night."

"We've had a long ride, father. Anybody been?"

"No. They'll give me till to-morrow, perhaps. You must not look down-hearted—feel down-hearted about me, Philip."

"How can I help that?"

"I begin to think your mother will get on better without me, my boy—you see I'm rather forgetful, and I can't help trust-

ing people who beg very hard and are next door to starving. I know they'll never pay, I know if they had the money half of them would rather not, but I can't help it, Philip. Your mother up stairs would be more strict with them if I—if I," swallowing an invisible substance, "were not by to interfere."

I had my tea in silence. My father sat by the scanty fire and saw a hundred futures in its lurid depths; my stepmother came down stairs and brought more "white work" which she piled on the table and began to arrange in a business-like manner.

When tea was concluded I got out my arithmetic book and slate, and made a pretence of being very industrious over my sums, and my father, finding the eyes of his wife upon him, walked into the shop, attended to the customers, and made a pretence of being very busy also.

My father, who had strayed to the door to look up and down the street a moment, which that night was three quarters mud and one fourth dirty snow, startled his wife and me by madly rushing across the shop and slipping down the step into the parlour.

"Oh, Lord! what shall I do—who would have thought it? Here's William Barchard. He's getting out of a cab at the corner of the street!"

My father was quite unnerved and trembling violently. He walked to the mantelpiece, and, for no ostensible reason, deliberately knocked off a half-pint mug with 'Philip' written on it—took up the snuffers, put them down again, took them up once more and snuffed the candle out, repeated:

"William Barchard—who would have thought it!" and finally sat down in his elbow-chair and stared vacantly at my mother.

"Perhaps he's going to call on Tackeridge," suggested Mrs. Farley.

"Tackeridge doesn't live at the shop, Mary."

My stepmother relighted the candle, and took up an old stocking with an air of perfect composure.

"Hadn't you better put that work away, Mary, and clear the table?"

"I can't spare the time, Farley, for all the William Barchards in the world. You may be taken to the Bench tomorrow, and there's plenty of your things want doing before you go."

"But he——"

"But he is not a man to think we sit here every night and idle time away by looking at each other," said my stepmother, "let him take us as we always are; he won't care what we are doing—he cares too little about us one way or the other, *I* know. Philip, go on with your sums. I hardly believe it's Mr. Barchard at all, he's too long coming here."

"My uncle is a very slow walker, mother."

"Where's the chaise that carries this rich man who has so little thought for——"

"Hush! mother, here he is."

Uncle Barchard, buttoned to the chin, came into the shop and thumped on the counter with a heavy walking stick.

"Ah! Mr. William, is that you?" cried my father, rising from his chair and going to the parlour door; "come in, come in. Who would have thought of seeing you, Sir?"

Mr. Barchard came into the parlour, nodded to my stepmother, took no notice of me or of my father's half-extended hand, and sat down on the first chair near the door with his hat on.

"Now what's all this?"

"All what?" exclaimed my father.

"What have you been doing to owe so much money to Markham?—what do you expect will become of you, Philip Farley?"

"You know all about it, then?" inquired my father.

"I have guessed it, that's sufficient. Mrs. Farley," turning to her, "perhaps, as you are a little more sensible than he, you'll tell me how he fell into these difficulties."

"Why should I tell you, Sir?" inquired my stepmother shortly.

"I am curious to know."

"There are many hundreds of great people who are curious about the poor, who do a good deal with figures for them, and write books about them—do everything but——"

She stopped; he might think that she was hinting for assistance.

"But help them, Mrs. Farley—very true. That's one of the ways of the world. Now, when does Farley think of being made a bankrupt?"

"Tell him, Mary."

My stepmother made no further resistance to Mr. Barchard's desire for information—she thought perhaps the past relationship between her husband and Mr. Barchard warranted the latter in making the inquiry, and so in a few plain words she acquainted him with the position of affairs at No. 54. Whilst she was speaking, Mr. Barchard drew out his pocket-book and began fumbling with its contents. At the conclusion of the narrative he pushed three slips of paper across to my mother, saying :

“Put them on the file, will you?”

“What are they?” asked my stepmother, her face flushing with a suspicion of the truth.

“The receipts from Markham and the factors. You'd better take care of them, in case of any mistakes.”

Mrs. Farley burst out crying—she who would have braved the worst storms of adversity without a quivering lip.

“Oh, Sir! oh, Sir! we did not expect this; we did not, indeed.”

“William,” gasped my father, paler and more bewildered than ever, “*you* have not paid my debts?”

“Yes, I have; and it's the first and last time I'll pay yours or anybody else's. Nobody has a right to get into debt. Better get into a water-butt and pull the lid down after you, and end your troubles that way.”

“God bless you, William Barchard.”

“The sooner you're out of this shop the better; there's no business to be done in it. You'll only get into the same mess if you stay, and I shan't help you any more. Once in a lifetime is quite enough for me; I never did it before, and I won't do it again.”

“What would you have me do, Mr. William?”

“Get out of this hole; turn journeyman baker, if anybody will have you, or open another business, and leave it to your wife to manage, or go into the country and do anything. But, mind you——”

He paused. We waited for him to proceed.

“But mind you, Farley, I expect to be paid that hundred and twenty-three pounds fourteen shillings, if ever you are able.”

“Or his son is able,” I cried.

“You don't mean what you say, boy?” said he to me.

“Yes, I do,” I replied, in a thick voice; “if ever it be in my power I'll do it, Uncle Barchard, and thank you then better than I can now.”

"I'll take your word, young Philip Farley."

My uncle booked it in his note-book.

"I have more hope of seeing the money now. Farley," to my father, "your boy has a Barchard look about him; he will get on in the world better than you have, or I'm very blind indeed. What's he doing now?" pointing to the slate.

"Sums."

"What sums?"

"Decimal fractions," I answered.

"Do you find them easy?"

"Very."

"What do you make of fourteen sacks, at sixpence a four-pound loaf, reckoning ninety loaves to the sack? Quick."

It was a simple practice sum, and having a fair amount of ability in numeration, I had no need to work it on the slate. I told him immediately.

"Right," said Uncle Barchard, regarding me with a slight degree of interest, "right, Sir."

He rose, nodded to my stepmother, scowled when she began to find words to thank him for his kindness, shook off my father's hand which sought to grasp his own, muttered a gruff "Good-night," and went into the shop. I followed him to the door.

"Uncle Barchard."

"What is it?"

"When I first rode out with you, you asked me a great many questions, if you remember, and then gave me a letter to take home to my father."

"Well!"

"I—I thought you had asked those questions of me for the purpose of shaking off my father."

"So I did."

"But not——"

"But, there, there, never mind. I should have been a bad servant of my masters' if I had let a man who could'nt pay his way keep his name upon their books, even if that man had been my own father, much less yours. Confound the boy, what a long speech he's got out of me!"

"I thought you a hard and cruel man; I beg your pardon."

"Tut, tut," said my uncle, as he stepped into the street, and made towards his cab. I heard him muttering to himself as he walked slowly along the dirty pavement, picking out every inch of his way in the most careful manner.

## CHAPTER VII.

## CALL THE THIRD—AND LAST.

IT was all arranged—we were to be very happy and comfortable now the weight on my father's mind—that weight which had been crushing every spark of hope and energy out of him—was finally removed.

"Never to get into debt again, Mary," said my father to his helpmate, "or to stop here in Harp Street and be driven mad by the tickets of Tackeridge over the way. We'll take William Barchard's advice and sell the business—if anybody will buy it—and go right into the country."

"Yes, and open a shop in some quiet village or other where there are no Tackeridges, and very little trust."

"I don't suppose that we shall save any money in the country, Mary, but we shall live and have no creditors, that's something."

"Everything to us."

"And the country air—what a deal of good it will do us both, eh, Mary?"

"Yes, but——"

"But what?"

"But what are we to do with Philip?"

"Oh! dear, dear, I'm a very selfish man. I quite forgot you, Philip, my boy."

I was at my old task of figures. I looked up as my father addressed me, saying—

"Leave me in London, father—I think my work lies here. How shall I ever pay Uncle Barchard back his money if I go to a place where there is no money to be made?"

"Leave you in London, my boy!" exclaimed my father, "no, no, I couldn't do it. Why you might as well be dead to us."

"Philip had better stay here," said Mrs. Farley; "the few shillings that he earns will pay for board and lodging; he must not expect pocket-money yet awhile. By-and-bye, Philip," addressing me, "you will earn more money, save some money, have a little book at some savings' bank, won't you?"

"I'll try."

"And when we're in the country——"

"My dear," interrupted my father, "there are six months to pass before you and I can settle down in a shady country place, scores and scores of miles away from here,—months which may bring much change to you and me,—months which one or both of us may not live to see expire. We know not what a day may bring forth!"

My mother did not answer—I fancied that she bowed her head a little as though she felt the justness of the reproof. The castle-builders went their separate ways, Mrs. Farley up stairs, and my father to his place behind the counter of the shop, leaving me to moralise over his last speech. Knowing what followed, it has seemed to me as if the warning voice called to my father that night and told him of the uncertainty of life—of the dark mystery which lies before each minute of the future and is ever wisely hidden.

My father never lived to enjoy his peaceful rest far away in the quiet country-home—there was a longer rest for him—and I believe a higher, better one in Heaven. Honest, simple, God-loving, and God-fearing father mine, it was my lot to lose thee in my youth—to see the world before me and no father's hand to hold me back when there was temptation beckoning, or wring my own hand with a father's loving pressure when the sun was shining on my path!

I did not think that night that a few more weeks were only left to him; that his health—never very strong—was failing fast, and every hour was numbered. I have been ever thankful that it was his happiness to die in peace, with the brother of his first wife standing by the bedside in that solemn hour which must come to each of us one day, and saying, with his hand upon my head, as I knelt there sobbing out my grief, "This boy—my sister's child, is my charge. I promise it here."

In the darkened room up stairs my father had been wandering for days, not knowing wife or son, his brain bewildered with the troubles of the past, and their revival in imagination a greater torment to him than reality had made them, but in the last hour he was calm and conscious.

"It is all for the best," he murmured; "do you remember, Philip boy, the night when I talked of the bailiff's carrying me to prison—Uncle Barnard's night? I said your mother and yourself would get on better without my interference; I believe so now—I believe so more than ever. That good

man," pointing to Uncle Barchard in the shadow of the curtain, "has come again to give me comfort about you, Philip—God bless him and reward him! And wife, you are young still—there may be a fair life opening for you, who knows? There, don't cry, don't cry, both of you—it unsettles me. Is it daylight yet?"

"No."

"*I—think—it—is!*"

END OF BOOK I.



## BOOK II.

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*"Fool.* What trade do you mean to follow?

*Chilax.* That's a question.

*Fool.* Yes, and a learned question, if you mark it.  
Consider and say on."

FLETCHER'S "*Mad Lover*," *Act I., Sc. 1*

"Whang, the miller, was naturally avaricious; nobody loved money  
better than he, or more respected those that had it."

GOLDSMITH'S "*Citizen of the World*," *Letter LXX.*

## CHAPTER I.

## TREGANCY.

"PHILIP FARLEY," said my uncle, "I hope we thoroughly understand each other, at all events, I hope you thoroughly understand *me*. I am going to send you back to school for two years and a half—to a school of my own selection, whence you will be enabled to make a fresh and better start in life. During those two years and a half your holidays will be spent here at my house, so long as you behave yourself. Ingratitude, or misbehaviour, and out you go, my boy, as sure as fate. When that fresh start in life is found you, I shall have fulfilled my promise to your father, and you will part with me to become your own master, and to learn the art of self-dependence. I began at an age as early as your own, and I find myself none the worse for the experiment. And now, don't build on future favours, friendships, or legacies from me, or you will assuredly be disappointed."

That was the longest oration my Uncle Barchard made in his life, and possibly took a longer time to deliver than any speech of the same number of words from the days of Demosthenes. Every word was uttered slowly and deliberately, and deep breaths were drawn twice at least in the course of a sentence, my uncle's respiration being a process of labour.

The preceding address took place in the formal front parlour of Uncle Barchard's house, three months after my father's death. It was a Sunday afternoon. Uncle Barchard reposed in his great leathern chair by the fire, with the yellow silk handkerchief which invariably covered his face during after-dinner naps still hanging in fanciful festoons from his large, but well-formed head. My cousin Ellen sat on a stool at his feet, a dark-haired, black-eyed child of twelve years old. A child with a thoughtful, pretty face, that gave promise of being prettier in the time to come. A face unlike anything that I had pictured in my boyish imagination, though there was a softened Barchard-look about it which stamped the child the daughter of the stout man in the arm-chair, across whose knee her small white hands were clasped.

My cousin Ellen and I had become very good friends since one roof had sheltered us, therefore she listened to her father's address to me with an evident interest.

When Uncle Barchard had concluded, I said in a low voice :

"I understand, Sir. You are very kind."

"You go to school next Wednesday," said he. "Latin and Greek, and all that rubbish, are very well in their way, but let figures stand A 1."

"I will pay great attention to figures, Sir."

"Figures, for a tradesman's son, who has a living to get—nothing like figures!"

"Is he going far away, papa?" inquired my cousin.

"Sixty or seventy miles."

"Will he have many holidays?" asked Ellen.

"A month at Christmas."

"Oh! what a little," exclaimed my cousin; "but the school-master will let him come to see us, now and then, papa."

"He'd better not," replied Uncle Barchard, sharply, "or he'll be a pupil the less. Philip must work hard at school."

"I will, Sir."

"No losing time—no idleness over book and slate—Philip Farley has a living to get."

Those last words, "Philip Farley has a living to get," were always my incentive to exertion when the school-world was around me and the temptations of the boy to idleness were strong. Never forgetting Uncle Barchard and my duty to him, never forgetting that it was my place to seek to deserve his confidence, and remembering that he had said one Sunday afternoon that I must work hard at school, I worked hard and did my best.

It was my intention when I commenced this story of my life to linger on the neutral ground, and speak of a few school incidents in which I took my share. But the road beyond the gates of my old school is long and winding, and there will be barriers enough to stop my way and turn me from my path. Therefore one glance at the school-days of Philip Farley, and then for sterner business.

I gained few friends at school, and many rivals. I had gone there with the intention of striving for a good name on my master's books, and succeeding in the effort I lost a great deal of that boy-friendship which, acting otherwise, might have fallen to my share.

I found the boys at that school very like the bigger children

in the world's school outside, always envious of him who gained the prize. We struggle but a little harder when the prize is greater, and our years are riper, but the same passions work within us as when we lived in fear of the ferule and task-book.

There were plenty of sneers and taunts from my cotemporaries when it was discovered that I thought more of the lessons before me than of the playground outside, where the fun and the fights came off. I took my share in the latter on two separate occasions, after the senior members of the school had objected to my perseverance, and taken the liberty of pulling my hair and knocking the books out of my hand, and have some satisfaction in recording here that I came off victorious—but damaged—on both occasions, some Bethnal Green practice which I had had turning out of material service to me in those periods of emergency.

I do not know whether the result of the fights, or a certain aptitude for figures, was the cause of my receiving the cognomen of "Hard-head," but from the time of my disputes at school until the day when I shook hands with a hundred boys and said good-bye, that appellation was invariably substituted for the name of Farley.

There is no need to speak of all the school friends I made. I saw no more of them after I left Cliff House for good. They parted from me with a thousand protestations of writing to me, of coming to see me, of asking me to their own homes, and then our separate ways were chosen, and we met never again. Of one school-rival, almost an enemy, I shall have more to say ere I close this chapter, meanwhile let me dwell for a few moments on my school progress, and on the progress of the lives and fortunes of friends left behind in London.

Uncle Barchard—as the reader is aware—had decided on giving me two years and a half education. He extended that period six months, consequently I was more than sixteen years of age when I recited my last lesson. I gained several prizes during my stay at school—they were hardly worked for and hardly won. I had no great share of natural ability—other boys learned their lessons or wrote their themes in half the time—but my unflinching exertions generally placed me head of the class, a proud position for me when the annual school-report went home to Uncle Barchard. One thing alone I was naturally quick at, in one study I surprised even my masters. I have had reasons to be very often thankful for that gift

during the course of a somewhat chequered life. Nothing in or out of an arithmetic book came amiss to me; the most complicated enigma that ever the brain of man wove into a net-work of figures as "a clincher" for the last pages of a *Walkinghame* or a *Colenso* resolved itself into a plain, straightforward sum after ten minutes' examination. I have read somewhere that the study of statistics goes far to deaden the natural affections, that they whose lives are spent in numeration—speculators, men at banks and counting-houses—are men of a hard, unyielding disposition, who cannot enter into the romance of a life, and who do not understand it. There is truth in the assertion. I have met with men who would have passed for calculating automata, and enjoyed as great a share of life in that state of existence as their own,—men of the *Gradgrind-school*, to whom facts are everything, who never opened a work of imagination in their lives or believed poetry to be anything better than the wanderings of a troubled brain. I have found a degree of callousness too in men of this class. I have discovered in myself—many years of whose life have been passed at the desk and ledger—often a sternness and a coldness that I should have been better without.

I gained many prizes, and added them to a few sixpenny volumes which had been rewards of merit from that cheap day-school (twopence a-week was the charge for instruction in writing, reading, and arithmetic), situated in the vicinity of Harp Street, Bethnal Green. Every Christmas I returned home to find my cousin Ellen taller and prettier, and always watching for my coming—to find Uncle Barchard as stout, taciturn, and grim as ever. Pleasant holidays they were to me in the Christmas time, with cousin Ellen for a companion—my former life had been too full of hardships to deem the silent, old-fashioned house of Uncle Barchard a dull sphere for me,—pleasant holidays, though my amusements consisted of a walk with Ellen Barchard's governess in a smoked-dried London square on wintry afternoons. Every Christmas-day I went to see my stepmother, who had obtained a shopwoman's place at a large confectioner's in Bishopsgate Street. The last Christmas when I returned for good I found my stepmother married again, and about to start for Australia with her husband. I felt a shock when she told me of her marriage, but it would have been folly to suppose that she was to ever hold sacred the name my father had given her in Bethnal Green church. She had done her duty by my father in his

lifetime, and had truly sorrowed for him when she was left alone in the world,—now she had chosen a husband of her own age, a husband with some of her own energy, and there was a prospect of a happy life in the future—a comfortable home in a new land where the name of Tackeridge was unknown.

It has been a consolation to me—often amidst pressure of business, which has made my nights sleepless and my brain hot—to receive, during many after-years, homely letters from my stepmother, tokens that her interest in me had not died away, and marks of an honest affection which lasted with her life. It is sufficient to say here that she and her husband prospered in the new world, and lived happily enough together. My path was not destined to cross my second mother's ever again, and so she passes from these pages, and this humble history has done with her.

Time worked its changes also with my uncle and his employers. Messrs. Crawley and Hopkins dissolved partnership, and the business was transacted on Mark Lane, in the name of the former gentleman. Then my uncle became extra busy and persevering in Mr. Crawley's service, was seen at the Bank of England selling out, and finally Messrs. Crawley and Barchard became good names on the Corn Exchange from that time forth.

I have spoken of a certain school-rival, the only boy out of a hundred whom I met again after I had made my second start in life. He came the last year I was at Cliff House, and immediately attracted attention from masters, ushers, and schoolfellows. He was then a tall, well-made boy, of nearly sixteen years of age, with one of the plainest, and yet one of the most striking faces I have ever beheld—a dark, mottled, swarthy face, that had been burnt up in the West India islands until within a few months of his arrival at Cliff House Academy. His eyes were black and small, but of that piercing kind which gave a fierceness of expression to the whole face; his nose was thin and sharp, and inclined to be hooked like a bird's; and his thin bluish lips did not add anything prepossessing to his general appearance. The whole head was small and ill-shaped, and his hair was cropped close to it in a style far from elegant or picturesque. He resembled a mulatto more than the son of an English gentleman; and the facetious boys of the school used to call him "Sambo" till he knocked them down with his hard, bony fists, and kicked them

when they were down. Rumour circulated through the school that his father, Mr. Tregancy, had died in Jamaica, bequeathing to his son and daughter an enormous sum of money, of which they were to come into possession at the age of one and twenty. Master Tregancy certainly seemed to have an inexhaustible flow of pocket-money that was the envy and admiration of every pupil of good old Doctor Groves, and the reckless manner in which a half-sovereign was changed and got rid of, took away the breath of the coolest of us.

John Tregancy—Black Jack was a title by which he was more familiarly known—was, without doubt, a very clever youth. He had received a good education in the West Indies, and had made the best of it—he was rather proud of his abilities too, though he masked his pride with a studied air of careless indifference which deceived most of the boys at Cliff House.

I believe this John Tregancy, during the time he was in Dr. Grove's Establishment, did more moral harm to his school-fellows than the half dozen or so of black sheep that were already there—idle, lying, swearing black sheep, which the best of large schools possess, though their masters may doubt my assertion. Tregancy was different from most boys—he was a sneerer. Men old in the world and the world's sin, speak contemptuously of all that is good, just, or holy, and freeze the blood of their listeners, but there is something more awful in a boy whose feet have not crossed the threshold of his school, discoursing like one hardened by the world and thinking his talk manly.

Tregancy sneered at everything—had a ready jest for everything. Boys who were fond of their mothers and sisters at home, or were proud of their big brothers and the "tips" they got from them in the Christmas holidays, boys who cried when mother, sister, or brother was ill, or who whispered the Lord's prayer before they went to sleep in their little beds; boys who exhibited any affection to their tutors or each other, all came in for a share of Tregancy's sarcasm.

A great deal of this heartless manner was of course assumed, for Tregancy plumed himself upon an utter indifference to everything in the world, and was never more unnatural than when he strove to impress us with his callousness. But there was far from the purity of youth in his heart or his brain, and the example was a bad one, for many of the weaker minded boys—naturally imitative—began to swagger and scoff and

aim at being miniature Tregancys. Striving for the prizes, he looked on as a weakness ; making wry faces behind our prayer-books when we sat up stairs in the gallery of the old stone church, was an accomplishment, if we did it well and escaped the glance of our preceptors. He had an unpleasant habit of feigning a cough ten times more violent than whooping-cough, and going off into paroxysms during church time which alarmed the congregation for the safety of his blood-vessels, and if he could only make the boy next to him laugh when Dr. Groves was reading the psalms for the day to his hundred scholars, he was easy in his mind.

The first few months after his arrival, Tregancy paid me a great deal of attention—he made me a present of some shells and curiosities which he had brought home from the West Indies, and invariably chose me for his companion when we all went out two abreast for our usual evening walk. There was dangerous attraction in the lad too ; he knew more than we did ; he had been in another land and could relate stories concerning it, describe scenes and characters with a more than common ability, though the stories were not always the most select, and the characters in his scenes were often of the vilest class. Tregancy strove hard to wean me from an earnest attention to my studies, he laughed at me, he satirised my twelve-month's labour for 'a silly book,' he even flattered me ; but laughter, satire, and flattery were all to no purpose.

"In your place, Tregancy, it might be well enough—but not in mine."

"Why not ?"

We were strolling round the playground two sober senior boys—the uproar of a school let loose ringing in our ears ! I repeated my uncle's words.

"Philip Farley will have a living to get when he leaves here."

"There are plenty of ways of getting a living. I don't think that you will starve in London a year hence, if you lose the first prize this time."

"Perhaps not. But I would begin to learn my lesson of life here—a life at the desk."

"Horrible ! I should give up the ghost in a counting-house."

"Ah ! you will have plenty of money."

"And you—plenty of sense," with a short laugh. "I wish you joy of your possession, Farley. Sense will never get a man through the world."

"Not common sense ?—I should like a little of that."



"Common sense—pooh!"

"What will get a man through the world, then?"

"His wits."

"Not always."

"Wits keen enough to overreach your neighbour, to pocket his goods as well as envy them, to trust in no one's faith, not even in that of your wife, if you are ever afflicted with one. Believe in what you see, Farley, and *only* in what you see, nothing more."

"Don't like your advice, Jack Tregancy."

"Who the devil cares?" retorted he; "you'll practise part of it, I dare say, if you live to have tails to your coat. As for your present practice, sober-sides, that's only to be laughed at."

"You dislike perseverance?"

"That depends upon the object. I would never work hard for a book."

"Nor I."

"For what then?"

"For the honour of being first in the class—first in Dr. Grove's list—head boy at Christmas with more work to show than any of you."

His deep-set black eyes flashed a little.

"For the paltry pride of being 'cock of the walk?' " with a short laugh.

"Yes, that's it."

"For the *pleasure*," in a soft drawling tone, "of going home to your respected parents—or uncle, isn't it?—and saying, 'Please uncle I have been a good boy, and I have got the first prize, and no one else in the school can hold a candle to the light of my intellect—what are you going to give the good boy, uncle, for all this?' "

"I shan't beg."

"You shan't have the chance next Christmas," replied he, quickly, "you shan't be first in the class or on 'old Grove's list, or have the greatest number of marks to show."

"Shan't I?"

"No."

"Will you hinder me, Tregancy?"

"To be sure I will. I said that I would never work hard for a book, but I'll work my brains out to spite you, and then I'll tear the prize to pieces before your face."

"When you get it!"

"I will get it."

“Oh ! no, you won’t.”

Tregancy and I became gradually warm upon the subject, despite our assumed airs of perfect self-possession, and after exchanging a series of aggravating retorts, more or less uncomplimentary, we parted for the evening far from friends.

Tregancy commenced the race next day, and devoted more attention to his studies. He informed those boys who were curious on the subject, that he had resolved to win the prize that year for the mere sake of “throwing ‘Hard-head’ overboard,” and related also his intentions with regard to that prize when it came into his possession. It was an exciting race and many heavy sums of pocket money and next year’s plum cakes were wagered on the event. I believe that I was principal favourite in the betting, my character for strict attention to my books standing highest in the school, but there were many boys sanguine as to the success of Black Jack, “if he would only,” as a youth of nine confidentially observed, “keep up to the scratch.”

I strove hard for the first prize ; I had set my heart upon it, that last year of my school life—but I found Tregancy’s marks accumulating and gaining fast on mine.

It was the custom at Cliff House School for each boy to receive a certain number of daily “marks” according to his position in the class, and to award the first prize to him who had accumulated the greatest number of strokes in the mark-book at the termination of the year. There were no separate prizes for separate accomplishments, but the general ability of the scholar was attested and rewarded in the first, second, third, and even the twentieth degree, when breaking-up time came round.

I kept my place in algebra, mathematics, arithmetic, in everything which brought my calculating gifts into play, but the marks which Tregancy scored in the classics, in composition, &c., considerably excelled my own, and bid fair to outnumber me in the grand sum total. There was a certain careless ease in his efforts which was particularly galling to one who laboured more arduously at the task, and his taunts, when any ill success of mine in certain branches of education placed me lower in the scale than he, often brought us, after school hours, to the verge of blows. But I never gave up—I did not even relinquish the endeavour to win the prize, when I discovered about a month before Christmas-day that all attempts were hopeless.

The bitter sense of disappointment—the sinking of my heart within my breast—I will not dwell upon. It was a boy's trouble. I have had troubles, disappointments, heart-sinkings since for the loss of prizes in my manhood, but that first disappointment was felt acutely, though the scars of those that followed were, and are, of greater depth.

Tregancy and I went home together in the railway train; our route lay for many miles in the same direction; we were both leaving school for ever. He was triumphant; I was dull and taciturn. My prize—"the second"—was locked up in my school-box; Tregancy carried his—the book of "Shakspeare's Works," handsomely bound in blue morocco and gold—in his large bony hands.

It was a very rainy day, and there were few travellers by our train. We were in a first-class compartment. I had put the rest of my pocket-money to the second-class fare Uncle Barchard had forwarded me, resolving not to be outdone by Tregancy, in the last scene which we might play together. We had the carriage to ourselves.

Twelve miles on our journey, when Tregancy said—

"You're sulky, Farley."

"No, I am not, Jack."

"You are sorry that I won this prize?"

"I am sorry I did not gain it, Tregancy; but you deserved it fairly. I am not envious enough to withhold my congratulations."

"Thank you, but I don't want them; keep them till I do."

"Very well," I responded.

He sat facing me, his swarthy face looking more dark than usual in the shadow of the carriage, that dull, wet afternoon.

"You remember what I said about this book?" asked he, with a peculiar glitter in his small eyes.

"Some nonsense or other, which you don't think anything of now, I hope."

"I never forget, and I always keep my word. My old father used to say that the latter was my only good attribute."

He lowered the window and the rain came pelting slant-wise in upon us, and on the dainty spring cushions of the carriage.

"What are you going to do, Tregancy? I hope you will not be foolish—I am sure that you will think better of it."

"No."

"If there was any bitterness in the struggle in which you came off first man, forget it, Jack! you have the best of me."

"No."

"I own you have beaten me—shake hands."

"Not yet."

He opened the book ; his dark hand in strange contrast to the white pages, which he crumpled rudely in his clutch.

"Don't tear the book !"

"Three guineas will buy as good a one. Do you think I care for this book, or its value? I said that I would win the prize ; now I will show you, Farley, how I care for the prize in itself, or the honour it has brought me."

He tore out half a dozen pages and threw them from the window. I made no further attempt to stay him. I turned up the collar of my jacket as a weather-guard against the pelting rain-drops, and then lay back and gravely surveyed the onslaught on the Bard of Avon.

Tregancy took quite a delight in destroying the book—the exultation of a mischievous infant—and the fewer the leaves that remained the more his good temper increased. It took a considerable time to get rid of ; there were nine hundred and odd pages, and some of them came out reluctantly, and were heartily sworn at for their trouble. What the occupants of the carriages in the rear thought of the flight of gilt-edge leaves, which the wind kept sweeping by them for a full quarter of an hour in an uninterrupted succession, I know not ; but it must have given rise to a great deal of speculation, as Hamlet of Denmark, Macbeth, Othello, and the rest of the immortals went fluttering by the carriage windows, making a track on the line, catching in hedgerows and dotting here and there the green meadows and embankments.

The work was finished at last, and Tregancy, after an ineffectual effort to divide the covers, and breaking all his finger-nails in the attempt, which I was inwardly delighted to see, tossed the morocco and gold after the leaves, and lay back in his seat with a Mephistophelean smile.

"There !"

"Do you feel better ?"

"Oh, yes, thank you."

"I think we may as well put the window up now, don't you ?"

"It *is* dampish."

After the window was closed, Tregancy stretched out his hand.

"Now, I'll shake hands, if you wish it."

"Not if it is any trouble to you."

"On the contrary, quite a pleasure, I assure you," said he, politely.

"Then I am at your service."

We shook hands together.

"Farley, you *are* a queer fellow," said he, with a laugh.

"I think you have a fair claim to the same honourable title, Tregancy."

"Do you know, Farley, when I first came to Cliff House, I took a fancy to your solid, business-looking, owl-staring face. I thought what a capital comrade you would make me; there was a little of my own nature in your confounded coolness which I liked."

"You soon got tired of it."

"No—yes."

"Which monosyllable stands for the answer?"

"Which you please; the latter, probably; I don't know. Sometimes I like you, sometimes I think I hate you. I wonder whether we shall ever meet again!"

"I think not."

"You do not care, perhaps?"

"What good would arise from the acquaintance of John Tregancy? Candidly speaking, more harm than good, eh?"

"Very likely. My father used to call me—so used everyone else, by the way—a bad boy. Bad boys don't make good men."

"Sometimes."

"When the bad boys reform, and try very hard to be good—I shan't do that."

"I believe you."

"I shall go back to my guardian and my sister, and learn the art of spending money in all its branches. Think of me in my carriage, when you are hard at work at compound addition."

"A pleasant thought."

"Ah! you laugh; but I should like you less, Farley, if we could change places. I should hate you then in real earnest. I am an envious——"

"Man?" I added.

"No; a boy with an envious man's heart."

"You are in a sad way, Tregancy; who is your guardian?"

"One who lets me have my own way—a capital fellow."

Ah! these capital fellows who let us have our own way—capital fathers, mothers and guardians, how many of them break their foolish hearts over us when the hour is too late to be firm, and the way is to ruin!

"The counting-house and the carriage will never agree, so we

are better apart," said I, reverting to his first topic ; " we shall begin our years of discretion from very different starting points."

" I shall be glad when I am one and twenty."

" Why ? "

" To be my own master."

" You have your own way now ; what more would you have ? "

" My own house, my own carriage, my own money."

" Happy one and twenty ! " I thought, with perhaps a little of that envy of which he had owned the possession, and the poison of which might have inoculated me.

" You don't come into any property at twenty-one, do you, Farley ? "

" Oh, no ! "

" Did not your father leave you anything when he died ? "

" His blessing."

" You fool ! what's the good of that ? "

" It may make a bright man of me, who knows ? "

" I don't see how ; my father died with a blessed lot of money, and that's much better. My father was a gentleman, what was yours ? "

" You are curious."

" Oh ! is it a secret ? "

" I'm not ashamed of it—a baker."

" Good God ! "

The son of the gentleman leaned back and looked hard at the son of the baker. His feelings were shocked for a moment ; but Tregancy soon recovered his equanimity.

" Ah ! I see now ; and your uncle has taken you by the hand. Is *he* rich ? "

" I believe so."

" Got any family ? "

" A daughter."

" Stick up to your cousin, then, and you are safe."

Excellent advice from a boy of seventeen ; King Solomon could not have given better.

The carriage rattled on towards London, and the remainder of the journey we spent together was full of home thoughts, and of those who were waiting for us at our journey's end. The train stopped at Reigate, and Tregancy broke the long silence by saying—

" I get out here. Good-bye, Farley."

" Good-bye, Tregancy, best wishes."

He must be a very bitter adversary with whom we cannot feel some sympathy at parting—perhaps for ever.

“Are you going straight to business?”

“Yes,” I replied; “you, I hear, are for Oxford.”

“After a little preparation with a rusty old tutor at home—what a life I shall lead him!”

“Reigate! Reigate! Reigate!” cried the guard outside.

“Well, good-bye, Farley, plenty of luck and pleasure in your new life! you may get the first, but devilish little of the last, I take it.”

He opened the door and sprang on the platform.

“Good-bye.”

“Good-bye, Tregancy.”

The train began to move. With a hand on the window of the carriage he walked slowly by its side.

“The best of friends must part,” said he, lightly, “so *au revoir*.”

“*Au revoir*, eh?”

“I shall turn up one of these days, something tells me I haven’t seen the last of old Phil Farley. I say,” added he, after a pause.

“What’s the matter?”

He withdrew his hand from the carriage window; he had reached the end of the platform, and was standing in the rain with a travelling cloak thrown across his arm.

“You did not get the first prize at Cliff House, old fellow, ha! ha!”

“Never mind, I may find another prize in London.”

“Make sure of it before I meet you, then, or I shall win that too!”

He laughed heartily at his own rejoinder—the carriage rattled on and we went our separate ways, he to his home, his tutor and his college, to his education of an English gentleman, and I to Uncle Barchard and to business—business which has made many an English gentleman, too, before and since the time of Philip Farley.

## CHAPTER II.

MRS. HOLTS.

"So you've come back."

That was my Uncle Barchard's first salutation when I arrived at his house in the Southwark Bridge Road, and found him poring over his accounts. He did not rise and offer to shake hands with me, and only a momentary glance from eyes which had not yet descended to the use of spectacles acknowledged the presence of his nephew. But Uncle Barchard's manner did not deter me from my advances; I went close to his side, and extended my hand towards him.

"I am glad to see you, Sir."

"Glad to get away from school you mean, lad," he answered, tendering his hand with considerable reluctance, as if it was something very valuable, and not to be intrusted recklessly to everybody.

"And how's Ellen, Mr. Barchard?"

"Very well. At least I suppose she is; she don't say anything to the contrary."

He drew away his right hand, took up his pen, and went on with his calculations.

"I fear that I am disturbing you, uncle. You are busy."

"I am," he answered drily, "very."

I was in the passage, and in the act of gently closing the parlour door behind me, when he called:—

"Philip."

I stopped.

"You'll find Ellen in the drawing-room. You have dined?"

"Yes, Sir, thank you."

"I shall want a little talk with you after tea."

"Very well, Sir."

"Don't wait tea for me. Tell Ellen that I have had mine."

After issuing these mandates he turned to his books again, and I shut him in with his manifold accounts.

I found Ellen Barchard in the drawing-room, that old-fashioned, gloomy apartment which had so astonished me with its grandeur, when I stepped into it from Harp Street. It seemed smaller and dingier than when I had seen it last, but it was a background to set off the fine portrait of Uncle Bar-



chard's daughter. How my cousin Ellen had grown in the last year—almost a woman! How handsome she had grown, too, and how well the thoughtful look, habitual to her from her childhood, became the fair features on which it was impressed.

She came towards me with both hands extended.

"How glad I am to see you back, Philip—never to go to school again too!"

I do not know what made me bashful—I was taken by surprise, and she had grown so much a woman since our last meeting, that I was too much ashamed to greet her with my usual brotherly kiss. I wrung her hands warmly in mine, though. I was glad to find myself welcome in one quarter at least; to find that Uncle Barchard's daughter had not grown colder with maturer years.

"How you have altered, Philip. What a man, too!"

"Ah! you are jesting, Ellen. Why, you are nearly as tall as I am. You are quite a young woman."

"Of course I am," said she, laughing at my surprise, "am I not fifteen years of age? Fifteen, only think!"

"A year my junior, Ellen—don't be proud."

"And so you have come home for good—no more school, no more tasks, no more prizes. I wonder," she said, reflectively, "boys are not more sorry to leave school."

"Why should they be sorry, cousin Ellen?"

"Boys seem happy at school, and men are all stern, and look full of care—at least all whom I have seen—my father, Mr. Tackeridge, and Mr. Crawley. Oh!" said she, with a comical little shudder, "I would not be a man for all the world."

I should not have cared to have been as dull and heavy as my uncle, or to have resembled Mr. Tackeridge, or to have been like the senior partner in the Thames Street mills—that dapper little old gentleman, with wrinkles enough in his face for half a dozen septuagenarians. Not for all the world, as Ellen Barchard said, not for all their money. We talked of my school-days, of what had happened at Cliff House during the last year, of my fight for the first prize, and how Tregancy won it.

My cousin Ellen was as disappointed as myself.

"I am sorry, Philip," she said; "I am very sorry. I wish that you had won the prize this year, and brought it home in triumph, cousin. Pa will be vexed too, though he will not own it," she added, slyly.

"Never mind, it can't be helped; there's the second prize in my box."

"What a clever boy Master Tregancy must be, Philip!"

"Indeed," I remarked, jealously, "why?"

"To have won the prize from *you*!"

"Why, Ellen, you will make me vain!" I cried; "am I so clever, then?"

"I think so."

"Thank you."

"Mr. Crawley was here last week, and my dear papa spoke of your return. He said he thought that you would make a bright man of business, you were so, so——"

"So what?" asked I, feverishly inquisitive.

"So, so—I really have forgotten, Philip. It was so, so—something."

"I dare say it was."

I was cruelly disappointed. Here was my cold, phlegmatic uncle delivering a favourable opinion of me—the first that he had delivered in his life, perhaps—and now my cousin Ellen had forgotten the most important part of it. Yet, I felt very proud, despite my disappointment, to know that Uncle Barchard's interest in me was gaining ground.

Ellen brought the topic round once more to John Tregancy. She vexed me slightly, she was so interested in my boyish rival. She looked disappointed as my relation of that young gentleman's exploits continued, and was justly indignant at his treatment of his prize when he and I came home together in the railway carriage.

During my narration, Mary, the maid, brought in the tea-tray, placed it on the drawing-room table, and retired. This reminded me of my uncle's message, and I communicated it to my cousin.

"Oh! that tiresome business—the more it increases, the more papa shuts himself in the front parlour away from me."

"Do you find it dull here, Ellen?" I asked.

"Dull, Philip?"

"You must be very much alone."

"Oh! I read and study a great deal, and I go to Mr. Tacke-ridge's occasionally, and spend the day with Annie, and sometimes Annie comes here, and now and then—not very often——" with a sigh, "papa takes me for a ride in his chaise. Oh! no, I am not dull."

"I am glad to hear that."

"Besides, there's——"

Ellen stopped. The handle of the door turned, the door

opened, and to my utter amazement a tall lady in black entered the room—a tall lady of about forty years of age, with a pale, deep-lined face, cold grey eyes, cold thin lips ; a spectral looking lady, whose appearance was far from cheerful, and who threw an immediate chill over me, from which I did not recover the remainder of the evening.

Boys in general are not possessed of a large amount of manners—I was not an exception to the rule. As the lady entered I sat and stared at her, my eyes and mouth wide open, my hands on my knees, my hair half inclined to rise on end.

“Mrs. Holts, Philip,” whispered Ellen.

Who was Mrs. Holts ? Where did she come from ?—what did she want in Uncle Barchard’s house ?—why had I never heard of her before ? Mrs. Holts walked at a solemn pace—she almost glided like a ghost—round the room, and took her seat at the head of the tea-table, whilst I, still a prey to profound astonishment, sat in the same rapt attitude observing her.

“Mrs. Holts,” said Ellen, addressing her, “this is my cousin Philip, of whom I have very often spoken. Philip, *Mrs. Holts.*”

“How do you do, Ma’am ? ” I muttered.

“How do you do, little boy ? ” she answered, in a husky voice.

Little boy ! I was never more offended in my life.

“I’m very well,” I said, totally forgetting to thank her for her kind inquiry. Mrs. Holts commenced pouring out the tea.

“It’s almost time, Ellen,” said she, in the same rasping tones, “that you assumed this place—I am only an usurper.”

“Little girls look old-fashioned at the head of the table, Mrs. Holts.”

“I am—you take milk and sugar, Master Farley ? ”

“If you please, Ma’am.”

“You have journeyed a great number of miles to-day, Master Farley.”

“Yes, I have.”

I had not taken my eyes off her yet. I could not make her out. I was particularly anxious to know whether she was any relation to Mr. Barchard, and why she was sitting at the head of the table with that face of care.

The mysterious Mrs. Holts addressed a few more questions to me, the purport of which I have quite forgotten, and the responses to which I delivered in a dreamy, absent manner,

that must have strongly suggested the idea of my being half a fool.

When I had recovered from my first shock, I could not help remarking that Mrs. Holts spoke with no little effort, as if it were a difficulty to break away from an absorbing thought, and that she had an unpleasant habit, when addressing me or Ellen, of staring over the head or shoulders at something behind, which had a curdling effect, and put me in mind of people who were ghost-haunted. But I got over that impression when the tea-things were cleared away—not being a lad particularly nervous—and Mrs. Holt had seated herself in the remotest corner of the room, as though the glare of the table-lamp was painful to her.

“Are your eyes weak to-night, Mrs. Holts ? ” asked Ellen.

“Very, my dear.”

Mrs. Holts began a fancy-work with two knitting-pins—rather fine fancy-work for weak eyes I thought—and Ellen and I talked of the year that was fading away, and of the incidents each of us had witnessed in it since the time I went away to school, twelve months ago.

Ellen talked a great deal of her father, all that he had said and done for twelve long months ; “Uncle Barchard must love her dearly,” I thought, for no daughter could love her father better ! I tried to change the subject to Mrs. Holts, and dropped my voice to a whisper for that purpose ; but Ellen was full of her one topic, and we were still discoursing upon it when Mary, the waiting-maid, re-entered the room.

“If you please, Master Farley, master wishes to know how long you mean to keep him waiting ? ”

I sprang to my feet ; I had forgotten the wish my uncle had expressed “to have a little talk with me,” and beat a hasty retreat from the room, and went down stairs to Uncle Barchard’s sitting-room.

## CHAPTER III.

## "ADVICE GRATIS."

I FOUND the account-books carefully put away, and my uncle by the fireside reading the "Times" newspaper. He laid the paper down as I entered, and motioned me to a seat on the opposite side of the fire.

"Now Philip, you Sir, why didn't you come before?"

"I was talking to Ellen, uncle, and——"

"You know I do not like to be called uncle, it's not the first time that I have told you that."

"Uncle Barchard was not in an irritable mood. I have said before, nothing seemed to seriously affect him, and he admonished me in the same deep tones, and with the same grave inflexible look that characterised everything he did. It was the mere cool expression of his opinion—Uncle Barchard was never angry.

I offered my apologies and took the vacant seat.

"Well, how have you got on at school?"

"Pretty well, Sir."

"Only pretty well?"

"I did not get the first prize, Sir."

"Who did?"

"A new boy, Sir,—Tregancy."

My uncle took a penknife from his pocket, and began paring his nails.

"You lost the arithmetic prize, then?"

"There was no special prize for arithmetic, Sir, I wish there had been. I got the greatest number of marks for that, Mr. Barchard."

"That'll do. Figures, figures, for Philip Farley. Figures for a man who wants to get on in the world. Never mind the prize you lost; what was it?"

"Shakspeare's works."

"Shakspeare—Shakspeare, I've heard that name before. Was he a Methodist?"

"No, Sir, a poet."

"Bah!"

My uncle's reverence for the immortal Will was as deep as John Tregancy's.

"Philip Farley," continued my uncle (he was very partial to addressing me at full length), "how old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"Close on seventeen, are you not?"

"Yes, Sir."

"At your age, I was a clerk in the very mill of which I am now a partner—will you take me for your example?"

"If it please you, Sir."

"That mill has altered very much in my time. There were once two clerks in the counting-house, now there are six. I shall make room for you and have seven."

"You are very kind, un—Mr. Barchard."

"You will have—I do not intend to screw you down—sixty pounds a-year to begin with."

Sixty pounds a-year to begin with!—startling announcement—I should be a rich man in no time.

"Thirty pounds of which will have to be paid for board and lodging."

That made a decided difference. I should not be rich immediately at all events, and my rosy dreams of sixty sovereigns for pocket-money faded away into thin air.

"What else I put towards that board and lodging don't matter to you just yet. When you can afford it better, you shall pay the lot."

"Thank you, Sir."

"Do you think thirty pounds a-year enough for you?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Try and save, boy. If you have a spare half-sovereign, and are ever tempted to spend it on some trash, alter your mind and drop it into your money-box."

I thought all this very good advice.

"And remember this, no man ever got rich by his own exertions who did not save money in his youth."

"It is not all that have it to save, Sir."

"Ah! you're thinking of your father. Well, well, but those who have it to save and don't are the fools of the world, and—the sport of it."

"I'll try and save, Sir." I was of a saving turn; the trial would not be a great one.

"Do you know anything about one hundred and twenty-three pounds, fourteen shillings, Philip Farley?"

"I have not forgotten it, Uncle Barchard;—excuse me, Sir, I must call you uncle now and then—I am not likely to forget it."

"He must be a very simple man that cannot save one hundred and twenty-three pounds, fourteen shillings, in his lifetime. I expect to be paid."

"You shall, Sir."

"I don't know but what I may want the money."

"I hope not."

"If you pay it before you are five and twenty, I'll let you off the fourteen shillings, and all the interest."

That was an inducement; but I was rather puzzled at the reason for my uncle dwelling so long upon the subject. I was grieved at it also. It seemed as if he regretted that loan, which took a heavy load from my poor father's heart.

"All the interest—remember that."

"I will remember, Sir."

"One hundred and twenty-three pounds, fourteen shillings—it's a heap of money!"

I was silent; painful reminiscences rose up before my eyes, conjured by these numerals. The shadow of the past fell athwart the present, and the grim early life came back to me.

He changed the topic.

"I spoke of board and lodging, that reminds me of what I told you one Sunday afternoon, before you went to school. Just pay a little more attention, and don't sit thinking there."

I woke up from the dark dream-land.

"I said that during your school-time this should be your home."

"You did, Sir."

"And after that time you should learn the art of self-dependence."

"Yes, Sir."

"You leave here next week to begin life for yourself."

I bowed assent, but my heart felt heavier. I had had a visionary idea of Uncle Barchard's home remaining mine, and of a cousin I should love like a sister, and be for ever a brother to. My uncle and his daughter were the only ties of kindred, and he was going to sunder them, or at least weaken them by separation. But I felt it just—I had no right to claim my uncle's home for mine—he had been more than kind to me—he had given me a liberal education, he had saved me from a low and wretched life, and was pointing out the path to honour and distinction; it was not my place to murmur, but be thankful. Still I felt the sense of loneliness very strong upon me, when I thought of going away, and strangely enough Tre-

gancy's expression wandered to my brain that moment, "Stick up to your cousin and you are safe." Did Uncle Barchard that night—he was a keen and observant man—think, perhaps, there might be some danger in cousins living beneath the same roof, and that Ellen and I were better parted, before our hearts and thoughts grew older?

"You may come and see us once a-week, come every Sunday to dinner, if you like. And Philip!"

"Sir!"

"You will be your own master—I have faith enough in you to believe that you will try to be the master of yourself. If I lose confidence in you, I have done with you."

"You never shall lose confidence in me, Mr. Barchard."

"Say that two years hence, when the brain is hotter," said he, shortly.

"May I ask, Sir, if you have any advice to offer me concerning my future arrangements?"

"Your lodgings, you mean?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I have found a place for you," said he; "but, you are neither compelled to take it, nor to stay in it. Consider yourself entirely your own master."

I listened with great attention.

"I am acquainted with a family who will board and lodge you—the name is Esden."

"Esden, Sir?"

"Yes, do you know the name?"

"There was a Master Esden, whom I saw once going into Mr. Tackeridge's front garden."

"Ah! yes—same family—circumstances greatly reduced since then."

"Indeed, Sir."

"Which Master Esden did you see that day?"

"I don't know, Sir."

"Of course you don't. Well, next week, if it please you, you will become one of Mr. Esden's family—he does not live far from here—do you know the Dover Road?"

"Near London Bridge, Sir?"

"That's the place; you will go there, understand once more, your own master, with perfect liberty to change your residence and to shift for yourself in any way you may consider best."

"I do not suppose that I shall avail myself of your permission, Sir."



"You can give up the mills, if another and better place offer, and I shall discharge you as I would any other servant of mine, if you neglect my business."

"It will be my duty, Sir,—"

"That will do," interrupted Mr. Barchard, "I detest professions, do you want any more advice?"

"If you please, Sir."

"There are two sons—Esdens—I know little of them, save that they are millers' clerks—but remember, one youth easily leads another astray, and it is never a difficult task to go downhill."

"I am not easily influenced, Sir."

"I believe it, and therefore I wish you to begin the world at an early age; no better lesson when a lad is steady, no worse when every knave can lead him."

Uncle Barchard paused so long after this observation, that I rose to withdraw, taking his silence as a hint that the conference was ended.

"Where are you going?"

"I beg your pardon, Sir, I thought you did not require my attendance any longer."

"I'll tell you when I have done with you," said he, "you need not be in a hurry."

I sat down again.

"I told you when you started for school, that Philip Farley had a living to get, did I not?"

"You did, Sir."

"Let Philip Farley think he has a fortune to get—he may get it by three things—thought, calculation, perseverance."

After another long pause, as though he wished his advice to sink deep before he poured on my understanding a fresh stream, he went on—

"Philip Farley must never think a fortune is waiting for him; he will not get a penny of money at my death."

"I do not desire it, Sir; I have never dreamed of it."

"I have a daughter to provide for," he continued, "you must provide for yourself. You begin at sixteen, say seventeen years of age, that leaves four years to one and twenty, eh?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Four clear years to lay the foundation of a future fortune. At one and twenty I expect to see progress. A man starts then for once and ever."

"At twenty-one years of age, I will tell you how I stand with the world, Sir."

"Good," said he; "now go to Ellen and Mrs. Holts."

"Mrs. Holts is my cousin Ellen's governess, I suppose, Sir?"

I made the venture—my curiosity on that point must be satisfied somehow.

"No."

"Oh! the new housekeeper."

"Housekeeper, ah! yes, say housekeeper."

"And—"

"Good-night."

"What, Sir?"

"Good-night."

"I shall see you at supper, Sir."

"I don't eat suppers now, they disagree with me."

Uncle Barchard took up the newspaper again; the conference was ended, I was at liberty to return to my cousin and to the lady who might be housekeeper to the Barchard establishment, if it were my pleasure to think so.

A bright thought flashed upon me as I went up stairs towards the drawing-room. Perhaps Uncle Barchard was going to marry again, and this was his "intended." I settled that at once; it made everything clear on the instant. I wondered whether I should be asked to the wedding, and what kind of costume the happy couple would wear on the occasion. And Ellen, what a dull life for her, with her silent father and her no less taciturn mother-in-law for companions!

The remainder of the evening was spent with my cousin in the drawing-room, with Mrs. Holts hard at work with her knitting in the background. I kept a strict watch on Mrs. Holts from the corner of one eye, and fancied that she seemed rather depressed in spirits for a lady who was shortly to become a blushing bride; but then, perhaps, she did not wish to marry Uncle Barchard, or, perhaps, Uncle Barchard did not wish to marry her. I fancied that I should not have been very anxious on that latter point myself, had I been my respected relative.

When I was in my own room that night, my little back bedroom, from which I was to be banished for ever in a few more days, I forgot Mrs. Holts, even my cousin Ellen, in thoughts of the new life before me, and of all that I had promised Uncle Barchard. Should I perform all those promises or fail half way, and lose my uncle's confidence for ever? Should I ever

pay the one hundred and twenty-three pounds, fourteen shillings, and my father's name be scratched off that small account-book which Mr. Barchard always carried in the breast-pocket of his coat? Should I have laid a fair foundation for my future at one and twenty years of age?

I waited and looked forward to my twenty-first year, that epoch beyond which lies the great battle-ground of life—waited, looked forward, hoped.

John Tregancy, in his gentleman's home, was looking forward too, and dreaming that his fight would be a light one, for he was clad in golden mail.

Dream on Tregancy, dream on Philip Farley, dark is the veil before the future, and the few years' march to one and twenty is on an unknown road!

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE ESDEN FAMILY.

The Great Dover Road is neither a cheerful nor a fashionable thoroughfare. The dreary-looking private houses, extending from St. George's Church to the Bricklayer's Arms, have a shabby-genteel appearance, taken altogether, and the front gardens before a few of them are miserable attempts at cultivation which have produced nothing but patches of brown turf and unhealthy specimens of wallflower and sweet-William, probably purchased off a costermonger's barrow at "a penny a root, all a-blowing." No one goes to the Dover Road for change of air, or scene; its proximity to London Bridge, and London Bridge's proximity to the Bank of England, Exchange, and all the merchants' offices, makes it a desirable situation for clerks whose time is precious and whose salary is limited. It is near the hospitals, and, consequently, eligible "hanging out," as "med's" have it, for students of those hospitals. The Great Dover Road echoes with City-bound footsteps from eight till ten in the morning—is full of noise and bustle after the dusk of evening has set in and the workers at the desk are hastening homeward, but is at other times particularly quiet. Midday there are only a few stragglers here and there, some dawdling tradesmen's boys, exchanging notes of observation

on door-steps, or against lamp-posts, a frightened man or woman with a hospital-card after the medical students, a policeman *sometimes*, a postman at stated intervals, and one or two vicious-looking men and women, who have crept, for a moment, from a hideous rookery at the back, called Kent Street—a street which would have been swept from the face of London long ago had the march of improvement been anything but “a dead march” on that side of the water.

Half-way down the Dover Road, in one of the dreary-looking private houses to which I have already alluded, forming No. 6 of a terrace to which there is no occasion to allude at all, resided Mr. Esden, his wife, and two sons, and to that interesting family—for there is always a certain amount of interest attached to a family that has known better days—I was formally introduced by Uncle Barchard a week after the conversation related in my last chapter.

My uncle and I found the family at home in the back parlour, the window of which commanded a full view of the rear of some choice houses-of-call for pickpockets in the street which has *not* been swept away; and as the Esden family has no light part to play in these chronicles, it is well to pause here, and glance at each member of the home-circle before we progress further onwards.

Sitting by the fireside, deep in persual of a book, whose yellow leaves and time-worn cover denoted its great age, was the senior Mr. Esden, a tall, thin, white-headed old gentleman, with full grey eyes, the brightness of which time had done little to diminish. His face was open and intelligent, and had been a very handsome one when its owner's years were less in number; it was the face of a handsome old man still, despite the wrinkles age and care had left on it. As I entered the room I observed that the sleeve of his right arm was empty.

Opposite his father, in an easy attitude, with his back against the mantelpiece, and with the two front legs of his chair elevated a foot from the ground, sat the elder son. Though evidently six feet in height, though altered from the dark-haired, dark-eyed stripling I had seen at Mr. Tackeridge's gates to a bushy-whiskered young man, whose years were close on one and twenty, yet I recognised him on the instant; he seemed quite an old acquaintance. He appeared a young man, too, whose acquaintance was worth striving for; no one to look into his bright healthful face would have doubted it an index to

a light heart, or a heart in the right place. If there were a fault to cavil at in as good looking a countenance as ever was sculptured for an Apollo's it lay in the lower part of the face, the mouth and chin being a trifle too small and effeminate. But, perhaps, this is envy. My mouth was rather large for a youth's, and my chin was a solid-looking affair, which gave quite a sternness to the rest of my features. I believe my chin helped to suggest the idea of "Hard-head" as my sobriquet at Cliff House Academy.

The younger brother, whose years were between eighteen and nineteen, was as tall and good-looking as the rest of the family. His hair was nearly as dark as his brother's, but his eyes were of a full grey, like his father's. There was an air of decision in the whole look of Charles Esden, which appeared to me the more striking for the delicate pale countenance on which it was impressed. Mrs. Esden,—the lady's pardon for placing her last on the list,—was also tall—I may say very tall for one of the fair sex—a slim old lady, with white hair to match her husband's, with a face as full of gentleness as her younger son's, and with eyes as black as her elder's,—a chirping, sweet-voiced old lady, who was the first to salute us as the servant-maid announced our names and ushered us into the room.

"Ah ! Mr. Barchard, Mr. Farley, how delighted I am to see you."

Mr. Farley ! What an agreeable old lady, to be sure. What a contrast to Mrs. Holts ; *she* had called me "little boy !"

Mr. Barchard's presence caused a small and immediate commotion. Mrs. Esden and her son Charles sprang up and placed seats for us ; the eldest son hastily dropped his chair into a natural position, and old Mr. Esden rose, put his book on the mantelpiece, and very courteously extended his left hand to my uncle, favouring me with a gracious bow at the same time.

"My dear Barchard, how are you ?"

"I am very well, Mr. Esden, thank you," responded my uncle, in a low tone. Mr. Barchard slightly nodded to the brothers Esden, but did not take the seat the younger one had offered him.

"And this, I presume, is the young gentleman, Barchard, whom I am to have the honour of taking into my family ?" asked Mr. Esden.

"Exactly so."

"I think we shall agree very well together, Sir?" said he to me.

"I do not doubt it, Sir."

"We are quite a happy family here, Barchard."

"Glad to hear it," said my uncle.

"I am sure," cried Mrs. Esden, "that Mr. Farley will find nothing to complain of; my boys are good-tempered, and we are all very quiet. I think since our great reverses, my good Sir," to Mr. Barchard, "we have become more united, more—"

"My dear," said Mr. Esden, with a proud air, "our friend Barchard does not wish to be entertained by any allusion to our great reverses, if you please."

"My dear, I hope I have not pained you, I—"

"Mrs. Esden, we will dismiss the subject. Barchard, what will you take? A glass of wine—a—"

"Nothing, thank you. I am pressed for time now. Excuse me."

"Not going!"

"Pressed for time," repeated Uncle Barchard.

Mr. Esden proceeded to see Uncle Barchard to the street door, regretting, in loud tones, that his friend Barchard was compelled to leave him—the hour was so early—would he stay half-an-hour?—would he come to dinner next Sunday?

Mr. Barchard declined to stay half-an-hour, or come to dinner next Sunday; and after a repetition of brief nods to Mrs. Esden and sons, and another brief nod of farewell to me, he followed Mr. Esden into the passage, and was shortly afterwards shut out in the Dover Road.

Mr. Esden returned, reseated himself in the arm-chair, and took his old book off the mantelpiece.

"I leave you to my sons, Mr. Farley," said he, in a more natural tone of voice than he had hitherto adopted. "I suppose you are, or will be, fellow-clerks, and so the sooner the ice is broken the better. Frank, talk."

"Certainly. What shall I talk about? Understand music, Mr. Farley?"

"No, Sir!"

"Hang your 'sirs'—ha! ha! that's a tidy way to break the ice. My name is Frank. What's your's?"

"Philip."

"That fellow there," pointing to his brother, "I call 'Charley' when I am in a good temper, 'Charles' when there's

a slight difference between us about wearing each other's collars, and 'Mr. Charles' when we've had a row together, and don't speak for a month."

"When was the last row, brother Frank?" asked Charles.

"Never mind—I remember well enough."

"I don't."

"Ah! you have such a wretched bad memory—try and think."

"About Annie Tackeridge, perhaps?" said Charles Esden, with a laugh.

"Don't be foolish," said Frank, blushing, "I never knew such an absurd fellow as you are in my life, Charles!—Annie Tackeridge, indeed!"

"Ah! I know," remarked his brother, significantly.

"Pooh!"

"And if—"

"You say you don't understand music, Farley?" asked Frank, with an evident anxiety to drop the subject which his brother had introduced.

"Not at all, Mr. Frank."

"Frank," corrected he.

"Frank," I repeated.

"Chess?"

"A little."

"Dancing?"

"Well—I don't know."

"Don't know!" exclaimed both brothers.

"Why, you see Uncle Barchard did not care about 'fashionable extras' at my school, and so I did not learn of the dancing-master."

"Of whom, then, friend Philip?"

"Of some of the boys. They used to teach me for a half-penny a lesson in the playground after school-hours."

"A novel way of cheating the master. Well, did you learn?"

"I learned the steps."

"How did your juvenile teachers say you danced?"

"Like an elephant."

Frank and his brother laughed at my confession, and Mrs. Esden, who had gone into the front parlour—drawing-room she called it—looked between the folding-doors and inquired the reason for their hilarity.

Upon being informed of the nature of the joke she said to me—

"You must not mind my boys laughing, Mr. Farley, especially my Frank, he's a terrible boy to laugh sometimes! But it's always in good part, and they're both dear boys, dear, good boys."

I heard her murmuring "dear good boys" in the adjoining room, after she had withdrawn her head and closed the folding-doors once more.

Mr. Esden did not take part in the conversation—he had become absorbed in his ancient volume and had wholly shut from his thoughts the friends at his side.

The ice was soon broken between me and my companions, the friendly manner of Frank Esden quickly put me on a familiar footing in my new home, and though the younger Esden was a shade more reserved, yet there was an evident desire to set me at my ease which soon had its effect.

I learned—as I had suspected from the first—that the brothers Esden were clerks in the counting-house of Messrs. Crawley and Barchard, and that we were to go every morning and return every evening together. I had no doubt of our becoming, as Frank Esden termed it in the words of the old song, "jolly companions every one."

My regret at leaving Uncle Barchard's house was rapidly vanishing—here, were youth and high spirits for the companions of youth—there, was only my cousin Ellen, who had made the house in the Southwark Bridge Road a cheerful home to me, and I should see her once a-week.

I felt that it was almost ungrateful to be too readily pleased with the Esden family—was it right to Uncle Barchard and his daughter?

An old-fashioned time-piece before the looking-glass struck eight whilst we were conversing together. Frank Esden, after glancing uneasily from the time-piece to his father, rose with rather an embarrassed air.

"Oh, by-the-bye," said he, in the lightest of tones, "I think I will just run over and see how Mr. Tackeridge is this evening."

"Is he unwell?" asked old Mr. Esden, roused from his book-study.

"Well—yes, he *is*," replied Frank, brushing up his curly black hair with one hand, and looking rather warm; "he's got a very bad cold—I may say one of the worst colds I have ever seen in my life."

"Indeed," said his father, drily.



"Yes, and so I had better run over and see him ; it looks friendly, don't it, father ? "

Frank Esden talked as if Mr. Tackeridge lived opposite, instead of on Brixton Hill.

"You'll be very late home, Frank," said his brother.

"Oh, no, I shan't," he answered quickly ; "I shan't be any time ; in fact, I hardly know if I shall go in yet. Merely leave my compliments at the door, perhaps, and make all necessary inquiries. By George ! I would not have Mr. Tackeridge's cold for fifty pounds."

Mrs. Esden's head reappeared between the folding-doors.

"Where are you going, Frank, dear ? "

"Only across to Mr. Tackeridge's, for a minute or two."

"It's very late."

"I can get a 'bus at the Elephant and Castle—I shan't be late—awful cold," cried Frank, in one breath, as he hurried out of the room and put a stop to further inquiries.

A moment afterwards he looked in, hat in hand.

"I shall be home very early."

"I say, Frank," cried Charley, "remember me to—"

"Bother !" cried Frank, hastily disappearing.

When the street door was heard to close, Mr. Esden turned his attention to his book again, and Mrs. Esden came into the room and took a seat at the table near me.

"Heigho !" sighed Mrs. Esden, opening her work-box, "I wish that he would not go so often to that Wheatsheaf Villa."

"Boys will be boys, my dear," remarked the old gentleman, without raising his eyes ; "fresh scenes and eternal change for life in its spring. He will be graver when his years are older."

"He's a dear, good boy," said the warm-hearted mother, "but times are altered, and the Esdens are altered, too."

"I hope not, Mary," cried her husband, "only the Esden fortunes, not themselves."

"That is sufficient to put a stop to anything—"

"My dear," interrupted Mr. Esden, "boy and girl, boy and girl ! Quite time enough to think of these things two years hence."

"Yes, but Frank is earnest and hasty ; if he should think too much of Annie, now ! "

The conversation was becoming particular. I half rose from my chair as the subject began to assume a private and con-

fidential tone, but Mr. Esden's quick eyes caught the movement, and he said,

"Don't go, Mr. Farley ; this is not a family secret."

He turned to his wife again.

"If such an event occur, Jane, I think it will be a good thing for our dear boy ; she is a very nice girl."

"But Mrs. Tackeridge ?"

"Ah, I understand," he said ; "you think there may be objections in that quarter. My dear, I have no fear for Frank. He will be too honourable to choose a wife before his position enables him to maintain her properly. Mrs. Tackeridge," said he, proudly, "need not be alarmed."

"But our Frank—"

"My dear, this is an idle discussion," interrupted he ; "we can but sit still and leave Frank in the hands of the son of Venus if the poor boy is touched in the heart."

"But," persisted Mrs. Esden, "if Annie should not like him."

Mr. Esden's proud look came back to his face.

"I do not think my son Frank will ever go begging for a wife."

"But—" began Mrs. Esden again.

"But you keep me from my dear old Dekker, Mrs. Esden," said he, with a glance at his book, "and I am sure these lads cannot be amused with our controversy. Ha, ha !" shaking his white hairs at us, "your time is to come, young gentlemen, make sure of the right ladies when you go sweethearting."

Mrs. Esden gave up the discourse, and took to needle-work.

"Fond of books, Mr. Philip ?" asked the head of the family, as he opened the volume with one hand.

"Very, Sir."

"You shall see my study to-morrow—my library, I call it, though it's only the second-floor back, and one can hardly swing a cat in it. Yet," his eyes sparkling, "I have some rare treasures there."

"Rare litter, you mean, my dear."

"What—my first editions of Dekker, Marston, Beaumont and Fletcher, litter ! My choice copies of beloved Will Shakspeare—my tracts of the Commonwealth which the British Museum would like to buy and shan't if I can help it—my black letter 'Arcadia'—my Holinshed's Chronicles—my rare

and priceless manuscripts—ancient check-rolls and inventories—I have one inventory of goods belonging to an old inn, with the date of 1587 on it, Mr. Farley ! ”

“A very early date, Sir.”

“I will show it you to-morrow, Sir—it will amuse you for hours, I assure you. Books *litter*, Mary,” turning to his wife, “do you know what poor Overbury says ?—

‘Books are a part of man’s prerogative ;  
In formal ink they thoughts and voices hold ;  
That we to them our solitude may give,  
And make time present travel that of old :  
Our life fame peeceth longer at the end,  
And books it farther backward do extend.’

There—beautiful, beautiful, beautiful,—so old ! ”

*Beautiful, so old !* Mr. Esden would have made a first-class critic.

Mr. Esden had mounted his hobby and there was no unhorsing him. He had found in me a new and patient listener, not one uninterested in the theme, and at it he went with all the enthusiasm of Quixote. He related, quoted, criticised, till supper time, and his last words were a repetition of his promise to show me over the library in the morning as I went up stairs with Charley for the night.

My apartment was a small neatly-furnished back room on the first floor, and Charley Esden ushered me into it, saying—

“Here you are, Philip. I hope you’ll soon make yourself at home.”

“I feel quite at home already.”

“That’s right. And now I am afraid that—” he began in a hesitating manner.

“Pray go on.”

“I am afraid that my father bored you a trifle this evening.”

“Not at all—I am fond of books—I like to hear about them.”

“It is the one great passion of his life, dear old dad,” said Charley, “and I do not like to balk him by appearing uninterested when he mounts his hobby. My brother Frank, I fear, pains him in that way, so does mother. Why, Farley, you have gone the way to win his heart in one night.”

“I bear the reputation of being a good listener.”

The time-piece in the back parlour down stairs struck twelve.

"Hollo!" cried Charley, "there's twelve o'clock, and Frank's precious late, as usual. My mother will fidget her life out about him in half an hour more."

"Will Mrs. Esden sit up for him?"

"In her own room. Frank has a key to let himself in, but my mother always waits in her own room, and I have good grounds for believing my father sits up in bed and keeps her company. But I am detaining you."

"Oh, no, you are not," said I, politely.

"Frank generally manages to lose the last 'bus when he goes to Brixton. I never knew such a forgetful old boy in my life."

There was a true brotherly affection sparkling in his eyes whilst he spoke. I wished that night that I had had a brother to love. I should have felt less lonely in the world.

"I wonder," said Charley, after a pause, "if my mother heard that clock strike?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because, if I crept down stairs and put the hands of the clock back an hour, she wouldn't distress herself half so much, I know."

"Mrs. Esden must have heard it strike; she has only been up stairs ten minutes."

"Then I had better not touch it. I hope Frank will be in before Grainger, though."

"Who's Grainger?"

"Our lodger," said Charley, the colour mounting to his face; "he's an actor at a theatre over the water, and comes in very late. Time works wonders, you see. We did not always live in the Dover Road, or take in lodgers, Farley."

There was a touch of his father's pride in the last sentence.

"I daresay you thought it strange, Philip, that my father addressed your uncle so familiarly this evening," he observed.

"I thought that they were old friends, perhaps."

"Oh, no! My father is—*was*, perhaps is a better word—an old friend of your uncle's partner, Mr. Crawley; that's how we came to know Mr. Barchard. But my dear father has one weakness as well as one hobby, Farley—he hates to be thought poor, or not the equal of any gentleman whom he may chance

to meet. And, by the way, he *is* the equal of any gentleman, too, there's little doubt of that."

"I believe it."

"Thank you, Farley, I'm very glad that you like him. But, then, everybody likes him. I'm sure I am keeping you up?"

"Don't mention it. Come in and sit down."

Charley was lounging in the door-way, half in and half out of the room: I was occupying an easy position against the bed-post.

"No, thank you—I'm off in a minute."

But Charley Esden was not off in a minute: he was in no hurry to seek the double-bedded room at the top of the house, which he and his brother occupied.

Charley had overcome his reserve and was as communicative as any member of the Esden family. He was in the midst of a recital of his father's history and of the rash speculations that had brought his father low, when a latchkey was heard rattling in the street door.

"Here's Frank—I'm glad he's home at last," cried he, exultingly, "that Brixton Road is so confoundedly dark at winter time and, hang it!—it's Grainger."

Charley did not move from his position as Mr. Grainger came up the stairs, two at a time, holding in his hand a night-lamp that had been left burning for him on a table in the passage.

"Hollo! Mr. Charles, you are up late," said the new comer, as he reached the landing.

"Chatting with a friend of mine, you see, Mr. Grainger."

"Oh—I see," with a glance at me from a sharp pair of eyes.

"Good-evening, Sir."

"Good-evening, Sir," I replied.

I had never been in a theatre in my life—I had a vague idea that it was something very wicked and awful and beautifully lighted up, and that actors were the most terrible of sinners. My father and mother had brought me up with that idea, and it was almost a fixed one. I looked, therefore, with some curiosity at this real actor. He was a tall man marked with the ravages left by small-pox, a shabbily-dressed man with an exceedingly genteel air about him. In fact he might have looked a gentleman in anything less worn than his coat, or less out of shape than his hat. His age was probably forty-six or forty-seven, but late hours and disease had almost made an old man of him.

"Had a hard night of it, Mr. Grainger?" inquired Charley.  
"Very," he replied; "where's your brother Frank, Charles!"

"He's not home yet, Mr. Grainger."

"A bird of the night, eh? Ah, the rogue, the rogue. Well," with a yawn, "good-night, gentlemen."

We repeated his good-night as Mr. Grainger opened the door of the adjoining room and disappeared. Two minutes afterwards a heavy snorting, indicative of profound repose, issued from the room that he had entered.

"He's surely not in bed yet," I exclaimed.

"Oh! yes, he is. You see, at Christmas he plays pantaloons in the pantomime, and he's so used to a rapid change of costume in the transformation scenes, that he can undress in a minute."

Charley Esden was talking in an unknown tongue, and I did not comprehend him. Pantaloon, pantomime, and transformation scenes were words with which I was then wholly unacquainted.

Charley once more resumed the inexhaustible topic of brother Frank—what a good-hearted fellow he was—what a willing fellow he was—what a lively fellow in office hours, and how he kept the clerks in a roar all day, what a fellow he was for everybody to take a fancy to—what a fellow he was to come home late from Brixton!

"I suppose Miss Tackeridge is very fond of Frank?" I ventured to inquire.

"I don't know," said Charley, shaking his head dubiously; "she was fond of him when she was a little girl, and we lived at Streatham, near the Tackeridge Villa. We used to meet Annie at the juvenile parties now and then."

"I suppose," said I for the second time, "Annie Tackeridge has grown up very pretty."

"Pretty, I believe you!"

"She was very pretty when she was a little girl."

"Why, how on earth do you know?"

"When I was my Uncle Barchard's boy, I saw Annie Tackeridge once at Wheatsheaf Villa."

"Did you though?" said Charley, "did it not strike you that she was an uncommonly nice girl?"

"No. It struck me that she was uncommonly obstinate."

I related the incident of that past day and of Annie's trifling dispute with her governess.

Charley Esden listened, with a queer smile on his face, and said at the conclusion of my speech—

"She may be self-willed a little. I have heard so before. She'll match brother Frank there though, ho ! ho !"

"Match brother Frank in what?" asked a voice close to Charles Esden's ear.

The younger Esden leaped in the air, and I gave a jump of nearly two feet in the same element myself.

Frank Esden—for it was he—stood enjoying our surprise.

"Shouldn't I make a capital housebreaker, boys?" said he ; "here I unlatch the door, bolt up for the night, and creep up stairs, with not a soul the wiser in the house. And now who is it that will match me, Charley?"

"Annie will," boldly replied his brother.

"Ah—chaff away ; what does it matter to me?—she will match me in beauty, I suppose."

He laughed immensely at this—looking handsome enough too for any beauty in the world.

Charley was getting ready for an assault in the Tackeridge direction when Frank, guessing what battery would be unmasked, said—

"Come along, Charley—it's getting late. I say, Philip, don't oversleep yourself and get a bad name the first day you go to business to-morrow."

"Never fear."

"Come on, Charley," said he, ascending the second flight of stairs. "Good-night, Phil Farley."

"Good-night, Frank."

The same adieux exchanged between Charley and me, and the brothers ascended to the next story.

I heard the door of the front room open before I shut myself in for the night, and Mrs. Esden's voice inquire—

"Is that you, Frank?"

"Yes ; good-night, mother."

"Good-night, my dear."

"Good-night, boy," said a gruffer voice, evidently from the same room.

"Good-night, father."

"You're very late."

"Not very."

"Past one."

"That clock down stairs is twenty minutes fast, I know."

"It can't be very wrong, Frank—Mr. Grainger has come in."

"Has he?—Ah! an early night, I daresay. Good-night."

"Frank."

"Yes, mother."

"How's Mr. Tackeridge's cold?"

"Cold—cold what?"

"Didn't you say that he had a very bad cold?"

"Oh! yes, and so he has still—but, by George, I quite forgot to ask him how it was!"



## CHAPTER V

### BUSINESS.

BEING extremely anxious to arrive at the Thames Street mills in good time for business, I rose the next morning as the clock down stairs was striking six. When I stood in the back parlour, about a quarter of an hour later, I found Kitty, the servant-maid, blackleading herself and the stove in a very vigorous manner.

"No one up?" I inquired.

"La! bless you, Sir," said Kitty, looking over her shoulder at me, without desisting from her occupation, "we's not early people here, Sir. The young Mister Esdens ain't never up till very late, and master never comes down from his books till the corfee's cold, and Mr. Grainger has his breffast at one o'clock along with his dinner. Missus and me is the only early risers here, Sir."

"Where is Mrs. Esden?"

"She's in the kitchen; shall I call her, Sir?"

Kitty the willing sprang to her feet, with the intention of summoning Mrs. Esden, but with a "No, thank you, don't disturb her," I went back to my room.

I was making up my mind to a slight stroll before breakfast, when a smart rap was given on the panel of my bed-room door.

"Come in."

Mr. Esden, in a faded blue dressing-gown, opened the door and stood upon the threshold.

"Good-morning, Mr. Philip."



"Good-morning, Sir."

"Glad to see that you are an early riser," said he, with a bright smile; "you must set a pattern to those sleepy rogues of mine up stairs, for they need one."

"If they do not profit by your example, Sir, they will care little for mine."

"Oh! I rise at all manner of odd times—go into my library, and waste away the early hours there—they don't know I am up in fact," replied Mr. Esden. "They are terrible fellows for bed, especially Frank. Never mind, those who sleep long and heavily have the lightest hearts; it is a great blessing to me, Mr. Farley, to find my dear Boys do not regret their lost position. Not that we have fallen much, mind—not that we have fallen very much. It is necessary to live somewhere near the mills, for the sake of the Boys."

(Mr. Esden's "boys" always began with a capital B.)

"Step up stairs and see my books, Mr. Farley, I promised to show them to you last night—you're fond of books, you say?"

"Yes, Sir."

"You may read mine when you have leisure," said he, as he led the way up stairs; "that is, if you take great care of them, for I would not have them injured for the world."

Before we entered the library on the second floor back—the door was open, and I could see there were not a hundred books there altogether—Mr. Esden strode up the next flight of stairs, and applied his knuckles to the door of a room on the upper story.

"Frank, Frank—Charley, Charley!"

"Hollo!" cried the voice of Frank, from within; "is that you, father? What's the matter?"

"It's getting late, Boys. Mr. Philip's up."

"Is he?" cried the voice of Charley, from within; "we'll be down directly."

"Down in half a minute," added Frank, in a smothered tone, strongly suggestive of a recumbent position, with the bed-clothes over his head.

Mr. Esden descended, and ushered the way into the back room, where his cherished books were stored. There was an old reading-desk and one chair in the centre of the room, and a green Venetian blind before the window hid the Kent Street settlements. Here Mr. Esden was accustomed to sit, and

fancy himself in the great library he had had, a few years back, before that little ivory hammer, which knocks away the foundations of so many fair estates, had made a ruin of it.

The books were arranged on a few shelves, fixed in a recess on either side of the fire-place, old dusty folios and thin quartos, ragged volumes every one of them, that were to other eyes than a bibliomanist's, something to be got rid of at a butter-shop, providing their condition would warrant a butterman to bid for them.

Mr. Esden rubbed his one hand over his chin complacently, as he surveyed his cherished volumes, saying—

“There they are, Mr. Farley; there they are, Sir.”

“I daresay some of them are very valuable, now?” I asserted.

“Very; they don't look it, do they?”

“No; they don't.”

“You would not like to give much for them yourself?”

“No; I shouldn't.”

“Ah! I've some unique copies amongst them, Mr. Farley, that I refused to part with when it would really have been a help to—to—well, well, well, there they are, and there they mean to be.”

He walked to the shelves and took down a dog's-eared kind of pamphlet.

“There's ‘The most excellent Historie of the Merchante of Venice, with the extreame crueltie of Shylocke the Jewe.’ Look at the date, look at the date! and here's Cutwode's ‘Caltha Poetarum, or the Bumble Bee;’ you have heard of that?”

“I don't think I have, Sir.”

“Not the book which the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London condemned to be burned in 1599? Every copy to be burned; but ha, ha! every copy was not—no, no, no.”

Mr. Esden gloated over his treasures, like a miser over his gold, and was as tender in the handling of them as if to touch them roughly were to give them pain.

“When, ahem!” with a hard dry cough, “I disposed of a considerable number of books from my library at Streatham, larger than this you know, larger than this!—I reserved a few of the best for my own private reading. A great number of the others, I am proud to say, are in the British Museum, and the property of the nation. I go and see them three or four

times a-week ; they are taken every care of, thank the Lord ! ”

Mr. Esden was still expatiating on the treasures in his possession when Charley came down stairs and joined us.

“Where’s Frank?” inquired his father, stopping in the middle of a description of a fine specimen of bookbinding, which did not appear to be worth twopence. “Where’s Frank?”

“He’ll be down presently, father.”

“A lazy young scamp, to be sure,” said Mr. Esden, trying to look grave.

I was rather surprised to see Mr. Esden and his son shake hands heartily, by way of morning salutation ; but the evident affection of the whole family was something new to me altogether. Uncle Barchard was never particularly pleased to see me when I came down in the morning, never hoped that I had had a good night’s rest, or anything of that sort. My father and my stepmother, too, had proceeded with their breakfast when I had gone down to mine, in that little back parlour behind the shop in Harp Street, and no compliments of the morning had been ever interchanged there ; poverty and trouble crush out all courtesy, and the heart’s affection seldom shows itself upon the surface in the lives of those who are always fighting hard. It was nearly eight o’clock before Mrs. Esden sat at the head of the breakfast-table with her husband ; Charley and I in our respective places—Frank was coming down directly—just a minute !

“You will be late this morning, Charley, dear,” said his mother, with her hand upon an old-fashioned coffee-pot.

“We shall have to run for it,” was the answer. “Philip, you can run, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes.”

Frank’s feet coming down several stairs at once were soon distinctly audible, and a moment afterwards Frank made a dash into the room. He shook hands with his father, Charley and me, kissed his mother, dropped into his place, and began upon a hot roll, almost in the same instant.

“By George! shan’t we be late ; what will old Barchard say, if he gets there first—why ever didn’t somebody call me?”

Breakfast was proceeded with at a railway-refreshment pace, and then I and the “Boys” were ready to depart. Hurried adieux, a scamper down a myriad of back streets, and,

finally, before the well-known gates of Messrs. Crawley and Barchard's steam flour mills. It seemed but only yesterday, when I turned the corner of the yard by that old iron-post and curb-stone to begin life as Mr. Barchard's boy—did I ever dream then of coming to business as Mr. Barchard's clerk? Had three years and some months gone by since the day I last set foot in the yard? so long a time and yet so little change! The same waggons going out, flour-laden, to their several destinations—the same carters, in many instances, some looking four years older, some unchanged—the same clatter of horses' hoofs—the same figures flitting about the yards—the cranes at work as usual—the sacks of flour dangling in the air—the plunge, rattle, plunge, rattle, of the hard-worked engine, still reverberating through every floor in the great mills before me.

There was a change in one individual whom I had left some three years since—in Ike Boxham, who rose up like a ghost before the door leading to the new counting-house which Mr. Barchard had built during my absence. Ike had a mouthful of tickets when I ran against him, but as he opened his mouth with intense astonishment, the tickets fell fluttering to the ground. Ike had become something more than a man—almost a Norfolk giant, or a Patagonian. Nearly seven feet in height, with a huge frame, an immense pair of shoulders, and a colossal pair of legs—he stood there a fair specimen of a sturdy English workman. Ike picked up his tickets, and half-sheepishly stretched out his hand when I extended mine.

"Things ain't as they was, Master—Mister Farley—" said he, as red as a peony; "and I'm jolly glad of it, for the matter of that. How you've growed!"

"Don't talk of that, Ike," said I, laughing.

"Well! I'm a tidy size for my age, they say," remarked Ike. "Good-morning, gentlemen."

He touched his hat to the brothers Esden, who, after a careless nod, by way of acknowledgment, passed into the counting-house.

"I'd better not keep you, Sir," said Ike, "the guv'nor's in the counting-house."

"Oh! is he—do you mean Mr. Barchard?"

"I mean the couple of them."

"I am glad to see you are still here, Ike."

"Oh! yes—we gets on pretty well together, old Mr. Bar-

chard and I does—he gives me warning every Saturday night for sumfink or t’other, and lets me off the next Saturday, as reg’lar as clock-work. But there’s the horses off of themselves!—glad to see you here again, Sir—werry glad indeed.”

Off ran Ike, in a pair of clattering boots that might have been the identical pair of three years since, had not his feet doubled their size to match his gigantic stature. I entered the counting-house—rather nervously I may own now—and the eyes of the clerks were turned in my direction. Mr. Barchard was in the middle of the room, talking to a thin, dapper little man, with grey hair, and a cast in his eye. I knew that it was Mr. Crawley by past observations from the corner of the yard and from my seat in Mr. Barchard’s gig, before my uncle, with a motion of his head in that gentleman’s direction, mentioned the name:—

“Mr. Crawley.”

“Glad to see you here, Mr. Farley,” said the senior partner, in the parting words of Ike Boxham; “hear you are very quick at accounts, Sir. We want quick-witted young men here, nothing slow will do in these premises. Gentlemen,” to the clerks, “the junior clerk, Mr. Farley.”

While the clerks were acknowledging my existence, my uncle said, “Mr. Holts will give you some idea of your duties, Philip. Mr. Holts,” to a pale-faced, light-haired, weak-eyed, washed-out looking young man, “just give Mr. Farley some idea of the delivery-book, the petty cash, and so forth, if you please.”

“Yes, Sir,” said Mr. Holts, in a meek voice.

Who was Mr. Holts? He was a new comer and a junior clerk, too. What relation could he be to the grim lady in the Southwark Bridge Road?

Messrs. Crawley and Barchard soon disappeared from the counting-house, and left it in possession of the clerks for the remainder of the day. Mr. Holts initiated me into the mysteries of the books of the Thames Street flour mills, mysteries with which I became acquainted rather quicker than Mr. Holts could give me credit for, as he went on explaining and illustrating long after everything was A B C to me.

I began my new life that day heartily and earnestly, with a resolution to work hard, and be a good servant to my uncle.

Frank Esden touched me on the shoulder as I pored over my new lessons.

"I say, you need not go on in that steam-engine fashion, my boy. You are not racing for a wager here."

"I am not hurrying—I worked just as fast at school."

"The deuce you did. Ah! you'll never keep at that rate long, I know."

Frank went back to his desk, whistling softly to himself. He did not understand my motive. He did not know that I was in debt one hundred and twenty-three pounds fourteen shillings.

Notwithstanding that attention to my accounts, which I thought was but an act of duty to my employers, I found leisure for observation in the little world around me. I noticed that Frank Esden was the favourite in the office—that his flow of spirits, his lighthearted jesting, his invariable good temper, had won even upon the senior clerk—a bad tempered man—who was the identical Mr. Steele that flung the key of the stables at me on the first day of my entering the mill-yard. I observed, likewise, that meek Mr. Holts was the butt of the more facetious clerks, and that he took their jests and practical jokes, when the back of Mr. Steele was turned an instant, with a sickly smile, and a general equanimity which said little for the spirit of that gentleman.

We got through a fair amount of business that day, despite the practical joking; and at seven o'clock in the evening the account-books were on the shelves, the clerks were sauntering into the fresh air, and Mr. Holts was turning out the gas.

"Who is Mr. Holts?" I asked of the Esdens, as we walked together in the direction of home.

"O! he was the junior clerk, till you turned up," said Frank; "a milksop of a fellow, is he not?"

"He appears very quiet."

"Quiet—he can't speak above a whisper. I never saw him laugh in my life, and he's as nervous as a great girl. He's a regular spoon, isn't he, Charley?"

"I do not consider him a particularly bright young man," said the brother in reply, "still, he's like the tortoise, slow and sure."

"And about as agreeable a companion," remarked Frank. "I do not know what can be the matter with him."

"Crossed in love, perhaps," suggested Charley, "that is a complaint that would make any man miserable, you know."

"I don't know anything about it."

"Come, Frank," said Charley, "you are more experienced in the tender passion, at any rate. There's——"

"That'll do," said Frank, decisively, "shut up, respected brother mine—will you have a cigar?"

"No, thank you."

"Farley?"

"I don't smoke, thank you."

"I do."

Exit Frank Esden into a tobacconist's.

"I mean to leave off smoking," said Frank, when he had rejoined us, and was puffing at his cigar with evident relish, "it's getting a confounded habit, and it makes my old father cough like one o'clock. Yes! I shall bid farewell—'a long farewell'—to the fragrant weed one day—perhaps to-night. I shall turn off here."

"You are not going to Brixton again?" exclaimed his astonished brother.

"Just for a minute, that's all. I forgot to ask about the old fellow's cold last night, and it looks forgetful of me, does it not?"

"Well! come home first," urged Charley, "and have your tea."

"Save me mine," said Frank, "I shall be home in less than an hour—good-bye."

And to avoid further importunity Frank took to his heels, and ran away.

Old Mr. Esden looked disappointed when Charley and I entered the room together; and "Where's Frank?" was his first inquiry.

"Brixton again!" ejaculated Mrs. Esden, after our reply. "Oh! dear, dear, I wish he would not go quite so often!"

"My dear," said her husband, quietly, "let the boy alone. He's a bright lad, and knows his own business best."

And so the subject was dropped, and Frank Esden returned about supper time, to tell us that Mr. Tackeridge's cold was a great deal better, and that he was very much obliged to Frank for calling to inquire about it.

Time glided silently away in my new home. Week followed week; the days grew longer, and the nights decreased. The hoary winter gave place to smiling spring, and life, business, and money-making kept pace with the seasons. I had become attached to the Esden family, and won from each of its members a little esteem for myself. I had learned to look on

Frank Esden, too, as an elder brother ; and to feel in my heart a deeper affection for him than he ever gave me credit for.

I may mention, in this place, that Mr. Grainger the actor suddenly and unceremoniously quitted his apartments, under circumstances which sometimes occur in the best-regulated lodging-houses, retiring from No. 6 without paying the rent, which had fallen nine weeks in arrear. Why I have alluded to this gentleman in these pages will appear hereafter.

Spring time. Frank Esden was nearing one and twenty, and his father was regretting, in unguarded moments, that change in his fortunes which prevented him making extensive preparations for his dear Boy's coming of age.

Meanwhile I dined at Mr. Barchard's every Sunday afternoon, and went to church with cousin Ellen and Mrs. Holts in the evening. A quiet, monotonous, but not unhappy life of mine till my seventeenth birthday came and passed away—a life without its cares—a few friends standing by my side, and not a single enemy to bear me malice.

Calm life of mine, destined to be a herald—as calms have been before and since—of many a storm, I pass from it into troubled waters. Troubles of the heart and the brain ; of my own and of my friends ; the outer life of business, and of the inner life with which business has no connection, were coming with my eighteenth year, and were to never cease again.

And is my life, for that reason, stranger than my fellows ? Where stands he who has had his fortune to strike out for himself, and has not seen his troubles and temptations dawn upon him ere his manhood ?

I do not repine ; my life has had its sunshine, and if not often or continuously, still I am grateful to the Giver for all that has shed a light upon my path, and saved me more than once from giving way. Let the story close, then, on the calm and still ; had it remained thus ever, what need to have written Philip Farley's life ?



## BOOK III.

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“Now fie on foolish Love! it not befits  
Or man or woman know it.  
Love was not meant for people in their wits,  
And they that fondly shew it  
Betray the straw and feathers in their brain,  
And shall have Bedlam for their pain.”

BEAUMONT.

## CHAPTER I.

## FRANK ESDEN COMES OF AGE.

FRANK ESDEN attained the age of discretion on the fifteenth of August. There was a little party in celebration of the event, at his father's house in the Dover Road ; a bachelor's party, consisting of two or three of his fellow clerks from the Thames Street mills.

Frank had been rather anxious to invite a few ladies on that occasion, a sister or two of the clerks, Miss Barchard and *another* ; but upon Mr. Tackeridge and family suddenly starting to Ramsgate for the season, Frank changed his mind, and only issued invitations to the sterner sex.

We had a merry evening of it in the front parlour, which was Mrs. Esden's best room now, and plenty of laughing, joking and smoking there. I attempted a cigar myself in the course of the evening, and had to retire precipitately into the back yard. Plenty of noisy merriment, which will naturally arise when young men get together, and which kept Dover Road alive and wakeful till St. George's clock, in the Borough, struck the third hour of the morning. Mr. Esden was full of his dear Boy, of course, and as he spared not the sherry, and was not so used to sherry as in the days that were gone, he became a little hoarse towards the close of the evening, and a trifle red about the eyes. But his dear Boy Frank was everything to him ; "he had attained, gentlemen" said Mr. Esden at the close of an after-supper speech of three-quarters of an hour "to the age of one and twenty—an age which was never without a certain interest attached to it—an age from which his dear Boy shook off all restraint, if he ever had any, and became a man. Should he say that he would be a great man ? ("yes, yes," from gentlemen, and "no, no," from Frank). He *would* say a great man, let the gentleman who thought Frank Esden was not able to achieve greatness stand forth ! (Bang came the one hand of the speaker on the supper-table). He had known Frank from childhood (hear, hear), and there wasn't a better Boy, a truer-hearted Boy in the world. Everybody loved him, and if he might speak, there was a certain young

lady—(Mr. Esden gave a sly nod at his son. Frank begged his father to desist—roars of laughter—general uproar—several women, six small boys, and two policemen round the area-railings in the street). Well, well, he would conclude—his dear Boy's health! Frank," shaking hands violently with him, "your good health and many happy returns of the day!"

Hip, hip, hurrah!—three times three—a hammering of the handles of knives upon the table—a general stamping of feet—Frank Esden on his legs, to respond to the handsome manner in which his health had been drunk that evening.

More speech-making, and more port and sherry, and if the wines were not of the best quality, still they went down as freely, and only Mr. Esden was a judge.

On went the night, in came the early morning, and still the revellers were wishing Frank Esden all prosperity. Quiet at last—the clerks going down the steps, some holding tenaciously by the area railings, and making off in zig-zag directions, with the head bent forward in a butting position. Mr. Esden seen carefully up stairs to bed by his better half and Kitty, and I left behind with the brothers Esden, surrounded by the wreck of past dissipation. Frank sat in his father's easy chair, his head tolerably clear, considering the circumstances; his heart full of good-fellowship. Charley, sober as a judge, faced his brother; and I sat near the open window, before which the white blind was drawn, enjoying a little fresh air surreptitiously—"it was so precious hot!"

"Have another cigar, Phil?" cried Frank.

"No, thank you;" with a strong internal shudder.

"A hair of the dog that has bit you?—capital recipe as ever man recommended. Look here, Phil my boy, here's a beauty!"

The very sight of the hideous Havannah, which Frank Esden tendered me, turned my whole mass of blood.

"Put it out of sight, there's a good fellow."

"Charley?"

"No more to-night, thank you."

"Well, I will then; I'm a man you know, and can stand it better;" lighting his cigar at a candle near to him, "one puff or two, and then for Morpheus."

"I'm rather tired," yawned Charley.

"Ah! you're easily knocked under, Charley," said Frank; "see how contented I am!"

"You don't go to business to-morrow, it's all very fine for you," said Charley, with his eyes half closed.

"No business for a fortnight, think of that, Phil Farley," cried Frank. "Mr. Barchard put me on the 'Absent-with-leave-list,' this morning, and I'm a free man and a brother!"

"How shall you spend your holidays, Frank?" I inquired.

"Guess."

"In going down to Ramsgate, perhaps?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed he, "well, *what* is the good of fighting shy of the grand secret which everybody knows? Come, Phil, I'll tell you!"

He spoke in the fulness of his heart, with the confidence of youth ere it has learned to keep back its better feelings from the light, with the fearlessness of youth, too, that is proud of its passion, and sees nothing to be ashamed of in its avowal.

"Everybody knows it, so it's not much of a secret, eh?"

"I should say not."

"Do you know Annie Tackeridge?"

"I saw her once when I was a boy."

"Ah! you should see her now, Phil! there is not a dearer, better, prettier little darling in all England, and I love her! there," said he, boldly; "what is there to be afraid of—I LOVE HER!—God bless her little self, who wouldn't?"

"Have you told her of your love, Frank?"

"Oh, ho! Phil Farley, you seem pretty well acquainted with these matters. No, I have not told her; I'm rather afraid of confessing, though she knows it, she knows it, the sly young puss! *They* all know it well enough, although Mr. Tackeridge fancies that I come to see *him*, and Mrs. Tackeridge considers me a child. By the way, I don't like Mrs. Tackeridge much."

"Don't you, indeed?"

"She's too fond of talking about *her* money, *her* villa; letting you know how well off she and her husband are; that is not pleasant to the member of a family who was once well off too."

"Decidedly not."

"There's Charley off to sleep, by George!"

"He's not in love, you know, Frank."

"I wonder whether he ever will be," said Frank, with an earnest look at the pale handsome face of his brother, "and how he'll manage love matters when his time comes on. Simple-hearted old fellow that he is, with not a morsel of pride

or ill-feeling in his whole disposition ; what a model husband he will make ! ”

“ Do you doubt your own qualifications for a husband, Frank ? ”

“ They say I’m headstrong, thoughtless, and inconsiderate, Phil—that won’t do, you know.”

“ Not for Annie Tackeridge.”

Frank’s face lighted up.

“ Oh ! I shan’t be headstrong, or anything of that sort, with her. I shall be too glad to win her for a wife.”

“ When do you think of achieving that conquest, Frank ? ”

“ Oh ! a long, long while hence,” he replied, despondingly, “ when I have saved up plenty of money, got a larger salary, and can give her a comfortable home. She’ll wait for me,” he added, proudly.

“ She’s not worth having if she does not wait.”

“ My salary increases every year, you know, and there’s a chance of being Mr. Barchard’s collector some day. The light begins to dawn, old Phil ! ”

“ I am glad to hear it.”

Frank Esden said nothing concerning the support his salary was to his parents, or how a considerable portion of his income and that of his brother’s, helped to sustain the home of the Esdens. Frank never thought of that, never regretted it,—he was too unselfish.

“ Why, we were sweethearts when we were little children, Annie and I,” said Frank, “ when we lived near each other, and saw each other very often. I met her first at an evening party, and fell in love with her at once. I was nine years old then ! ”

“ Nothing like beginning early.”

“ You dry rascal ! your time is coming as well as mine. Seventeen’s an impressionable age, and I shall have the laugh of you some day. By George, I’ll not spare you ! ”

“ *When* the time comes—laugh away.”

“ Don’t you think that you will ever fall in love, then ? ”

“ I’m sure I shan’t,” I replied. “ I’m doomed to be an old bachelor—a fellow for figures and account books—nothing else.”

“ Confident young man.”

“ But you have not told me in what manner you intend to spend your holidays, Frank.”

“ I shall go down to Ramsgate. I have been saving up these

four months for that purpose. The Tackeridges go to Ramsgate at the end of every summer, Phil."

"Have they given you an invitation?"

"No! I shall take them by surprise—ha! ha!—how they will stare! and won't Annie be pleased! perhaps I shall get formally engaged before I come back—I hope so."

"Have you plenty of courage to face Mrs. T.?"

"Not a grain's-worth. You see, Annie's mother has got a vexatious habit of looking upon me as a boy in a pinafore, and Annie as a baby in arms. She calls me 'Master Esden,' and Annie 'child;' yet, Annie's sixteen now. Ridiculous, is it not?"

"Very."

"But if everything's right, and I see fair sailing before me, I shall make the desperate venture. By George, if I were only sure of her being mine some day!"

"It's time to make sure, Frank."

"True. I am one and twenty."

"When *are* you going to bed?" asked Charley, suddenly becoming as upright as a poker, and looking very wide-awake.

"You have been trying to go to sleep, haven't you?" asked Frank, ironically.

"I should have been off in another minute. Come on."

"I say, Phil, I have an idea in my head—such a queer one."

"What is it?"

"We are allowed a week's holiday at the mills. Ask for yours at once, and run down with me."

I shook my head.

"Come, you are putting by money, I know. How about that money-box which I hear rattling sometimes?"

"No, no!"

"You are not going to turn miser, I hope, Philip?"

"Not I. I'm not saving for myself."

"For whom, then?"

"I will tell you the story another time—it's late now."

We three had risen, and were making for the staircase.

"Better come with me," urged Frank; "I will take every care of you, and I hate going down alone. Charley cannot leave at the same time as myself, because we work on the same books, and my father and mother won't stir out of Dover Road—but you might. We'll go down economically—take a back room in a back street, and then I'll——"

"Leave me in the back room, and go to see Mr. Tackeridge."

"Oh ! I'll take you to see him too. He'll be glad to see any friend of mine."

"I should not care to trouble him. I should find something to amuse myself with in your absence, I daresay."

"And you will come ? "

"I wish it was in my power."

"You are looking precious pale, Phil. London air don't agree with you ; think it over before the day after to-morrow—do."

"It's no good thinking. Thank you for the offer though, Frank, but I can't go."

"You are your own master."

"So I have been told before."

"Oh ! go and take care of him, Phil," said Charley, as we stood before the door of my room, "he's not to be trusted alone—he's in love."

"Who denies it ? " cried Frank, gaily—"good-night, Phil—now, *do* think it over."

The brothers ascended to their chamber, leaving me to think over Frank's proposition, with the accusing daylight stealing in through the window-blind.

I should certainly like to go ; I might go for four days—*three* days—to go with Frank Esden to the sea-side for three days ! It would not cost much. I *was* pale. I did not feel quite well in health—that cigar had been the ruin of my constitution.

Still thinking it over, when Frank came running down stairs again.

"Look here ; look here !" cried he, with tears swimming in his eyes, as he burst into my room, with a little case in his hand, "just look here, Phil. Here's a surprise !"

It was a small jeweller's box, in the centre of which rested a little breast-pin—a forget-me-not of turquoisc-stones, set in a slight framework of gold. Not a valuable gift ; but to Frank Esden something that the world could never buy.

"Who gave it you, Frank ? "

"Guess."

"Your father ? "

"Oh, no ! his present is up stairs under the pillow. I forgot to bring it down. It's the gold watch that he has worn for thirty years himself, God bless him ! but this, *this* is from my Annie !"

"How do you know ? "

"It's on the box—see."

In a delicate hand-writing I read, "Frank Esden. From his friend Annie."

"I don't know how this got here—my mother's in the secret. The dear girl did not forget my twenty-first birthday, Phil. 'Forget-me-not.' Ah! Annie, Annie, I think of you too much already!"

Full of his present, he took the breast-pin from its nest of wool, laid it on the palm of his hand, and sat down on the first vacant chair to admire it, as if the time was about six in the evening.

"I have to thank you, Phil," said he, with his eyes on the breast-pin, "for that stylish neckerchief you left me up stairs, along with Charley's shirt-studs, and my mother's embroidered waistcoat piece. I am a lucky fellow to have so many friends."

"Very," said I, gaping frightfully.

"But you want to go to bed—of course you do!" he cried, starting up alarmed; "I beg you pardon. All this is not very affecting to you, Phil. Never mind, my boy, make me your confidant when you fall in love yourself, and I'll sit up all night to hear the full particulars. Good-night, and don't forget Ramsgate."

Frank Esden departed, and I got to bed at last.

I thought of Ramsgate again before I fell asleep—thought of something else, too, which kept me from immediately closing my eyes,—of Frank Esden, and his boyish passion, for it was like a boy's, so fierce, and yet so pure.

I wondered whether Frank would ever marry Annie Tackeridge, the wealthy baker's daughter, or whether Annie in the days to come, would love some one better than that friend to whom she had sent a jewelled breast-pin when he was one and twenty.



## CHAPTER II.

### HOLIDAYS.

I MADE up my mind the next day—I would go to Ramsgate with Frank Esden for three days, provided uncle Barchard would grant me leave of absence. There was an



attraction in going to the sea-side with Frank Esden that was not to be resisted. Three days—one clear day at Ramsgate, and two for journeying to and fro. It should be my only holiday for the year, and then business for ever afterwards.

Uncle Barchard not showing himself at the counting-house that day, I resolved to run over to his house in the evening and solicit three days' absence. I felt very nervous when I was admitted into the well-known hall, and the servant-maid had informed me that Mr. Barchard was in the usual parlour making up his books.

"There's no occasion to announce me," said I, with my hand upon the door. "How's Miss Ellen?"

"She's out of town, Sir."

"Oh! indeed."

I tapped at the door, and Mr. Barchard's deep voice responded to the summons.

"Come in."

Mr. Barchard was at his old post, deep in calculations.

"Well, Sir—what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing very serious, Mr. Barchard."

"What is it then?" said my uncle, testily; "I hardly expected to see you here to-night, Philip."

"I have come to ask a little favour, Sir."

I coloured as I spoke. I was not used to asking favours; they embarrassed me.

"What do you want?"

"I wished to know, Sir, if I could be spared from business for three days?"

"For what reason?"

"Frank Esden is going to Ramsgate, Sir, and I should like to accompany him, if you have no objection."

"For three days?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Is that the way you settle down to business habits, Philip Farley?"

"I do not want my week's holiday this summer, Mr. Barchard—only these three days."

"You have taken a fancy to this Frank Esden, then?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Go with him, Philip. Keep steady, and don't spend more money than you can help."

"If you have the least objection, Sir, I——"

"If I had I would tell you so," he interrupted. "The change

will not do you any harm. I hate change, and I never leave town myself, except from Saturday to Monday morning when Ellen is away, and the horrid journey always makes me ill."

"Ellen is out of town, Sir, I hear."

"Yes, with the Tackeridges. How that man Tackeridge keeps his business together, gadding about month after month, is more than I can tell. But it's no business of mine."

Mr. Barchard put his hand in his pocket and brought out a sovereign.

"Here."

I drew back.

"No, thank you, Sir."

"Why not?"

"I have saved a little money, Mr. Barchard; not a great deal, but more than enough to pay the expenses of my journey. Thank you, Sir, all the same."

Uncle Barchard returned his sovereign to his trousers' pocket, and took up his pen again.

"Glad to hear that you have begun to save, Sir."

Well acquainted with Uncle Barchard's ways, I rose to take my leave.

"If you have time, perhaps you will call on Ellen, and tell her that I shall be down on Saturday. Here's the address. Good-night."

Going out of the street door I met Mrs. Holts, thickly veiled, coming in with a latchkey.

Mrs. Holts gave a scream, which might have been heard at Southwark Bridge, and sprang backwards in alarm.

"Oh, it's you! What a fright you have given me to be sure. Oh! my heart!"

Mrs. Holts plumped down on the doorstep, and, putting her hand to her left side, sat there panting.

"I really beg your pardon, Mrs. Holts. I hope that I have not alarmed you. Can I fetch you anything?"

"No, you can't. Oh, dear! I shall be better in a minute."

Mrs. Holts rose to her feet by the assistance of the area railings on each side of her, and looking at me through her veil in rather a savage manner, asked, "What I wanted there to-night?"

I did not consider it any business of Mrs. Holts, but I informed her nevertheless.

"Holiday, indeed!" she said. "What does a young fellow

like you, full of health and strength, want a holiday for? How's my son?"

"He was very well this afternoon, Ma'am."

I had long since discovered the relationship which existed between this same nervous lady and young Holts, at the counting-house.

"He's never very well—a weak rat at the best of times," said she. "When is he to have *his* holidays, and take his poor mother into the country?"

"I don't know, Ma'am."

"Good-night to you," said she, suddenly, "I'm keeping you away from better company. Next time you open a door from the inside, don't jump into the street like a harlequin and frighten people into convulsions."

As I went home to Dover Road that evening I thought Mrs. Holts the most unpleasant and disagreeable woman whom I had ever met with in my life. But Mrs. Holts was soon forgotten; what had Uncle Barchard's housekeeper—I supposed she might be considered housekeeper now—to do with me and my trip to Ramsgate? I had to think of the first real holiday in my life—of three happy days in store for me, and my brain was full of speculation.

The next morning Frank Esden and I went away in the best of spirits, and old Mr. Esden came as far as London Bridge wharf to see the boat off. What a thousand injunctions he gave us to be careful of ourselves, not to be rash if we went out sailing, or venturesome if we went out swimming, but to be particularly careful in everything we undertook!

"Better come and take care of us, father."

"No, thank you, Boy, no, thank you," replied Mr. Esden, "my books afford me every change I want, and I would not leave them for three days for all the world. Now, pray, take care of yourself, my dear Boy."

"All right, father."

"See that he don't get into mischief, Philip. You are a steady fellow, and must keep a watchful eye upon him."

"Trust me, Mr. Esden."

He parted reluctantly with his son, and the General Steam Navigation Company's boat steamed off for the Isle of Thanet.

Frank Esden looked a handsome young man that day, and quite a person of consequence with his turquoise breast-pin. There was a certain amount of pride in Frank Esden, too, for he would repair to the best end of the boat, dine on board, and

smoke his cigars after dinner with the best of the passengers. This outlay of money, and the outlay he necessarily caused me to keep up with him, took away my breath for a commencement, and I ventured a remonstrance.

"Oh, you are a careful party, Phil," said he, "you will be the chap to turn over the guineas, and cry over every one you spend, when you are as old as your Uncle Bar-chard."

"No, I shan't do that, Frank. But we have not started with a large sum of money, and if you just reckon——"

"Confound your figures!" exclaimed Frank, "I never knew such a calculating machine as you are. Leave the figures in the dusty ledgers at home, we are quit of them—huzza!"

Frank's spirits were more than commonly exuberant; I was quite dull by contrast. How he enjoyed everything he saw and heard, how he beat time to a wretched harp and violin that came on board at Blackwall to torment us; how he climbed upon the paddle-box in defiance of written injunctions to the contrary, and was keeping the captain in a series of broad grins from the first moment he entered into conversation with him! What a number of dandies scowled at him, and looked superciliously at him through their eyeglasses, and how many furtive glances from beneath sun shades and brown straw hats were bestowed in his direction! This is a painful reminiscence now—why dwell upon it?

At four in the afternoon we steamed into Ramsgate harbour, and Frank, tightly clutching his carpet-bag, made preparations to get on shore the moment the boat was within jumping distance.

"Now, Phil—look alive."

"Wait a moment—don't be in such a hurry."

"I tell you that I want to find a lodging, and come out again on the cliffs, before half these sleepy-headed people have got over their shrimps and weak tea.—Now, then, jump."

And Frank, to the dismay of the female passengers, leaped on to the landing place and fairly overturned a man in a white smock who was making himself very busy with the end of a rope.

Blushing to the crown of my head, as old Mr. Esden's last injunctions rushed to my mind, I sprang after Frank,

and away we went scampering up the damp wooden steps of the pier, and hurrying through a lane of sea-side settlers all waiting for their friends.

"Do you think it likely any of the Tackeridges are waiting here?" I suggested.

"I don't see them. I had rather call at their apartments than meet them here. Come on, come on!"

Frank tore along the stone causeway as if for his life, pushing away the dirty little boys who harassed him in the front and rear with applications to carry his carpet-bag, and was probably in the town of Ramsgate before twenty people had given up their tickets and stepped on shore in a rational manner.

Frank Esden, after securing a double-bedded room in an out-of-the-way square at the back of the town, and ordering tea for two immediately, sat himself down on a cane-bottomed chair and putting a hand on each knee looked me full in the face, and said :

"Well, what do you think of Ramsgate?"

"Well, I shan't think much of it if we gallop about at this rate during my stay."

He laughed.

"Nothing like dispatch, Phil. See, we have saved nearly half an hour. We shall meet the Tackeridges in good time, now."

"Ah! shan't *we*?"

An hour afterwards Frank Esden and I, spruced up for the occasion, sallied from our lodgings. Frank Esden, by some mysterious means, knew where the Tackeridges were residing, and did not trouble me for the address Uncle Barchard had given me. He seemed well acquainted with the town, too, for he marched me unhesitatingly through a labyrinth of back streets and brought me out on that fine sweep of coast, known, I believe, by the name of the West Cliff.

"No. 640," said Frank, looking attentively at the numbers on the doors of a row of houses with green balconies and verandahs, "let us see, which is no 640? I say, you Sir," to an imbecile looking old man dragging along an empty Bath chair, "which is No. 640?"

"Corner of the row—alongside of Marchmont House."

"Thank you, governor. Come along, Phil."

Frank set off at his old rate, but as we neared the house inquired for, his pace began to slacken gradually, and when with-

in five doors of the object of our search he came suddenly to a full stop.

"Perhaps they are out—gone over to Calais eh, Phil?"

"I see a dress or two flitting before the windows on the first floor."

"The room with the windows open—ah! I daresay that's the place, I'm so glad that they are at home."

"So am I."

"We need not hurry now. Just look at this sea view a moment. It's splendid!"

Poor Frank's vivacity had disappeared in an unaccountable manner, his haste to call upon the Tackeridge family had also wonderfully abated, and he crawled at a snail's pace across the road to the iron railings at the cliff's edge.

"There's a view for you," said he, absently, "how the sea breeze freshens one up! This beats Thames Street."

"Ah! don't it, Frank?"

"How happy everybody seems, too—here's a sailing-boat coming in—by George! this is something like a holiday."

"There's some one at the window of No. 640."

"I see—don't look round, I want to take them by surprise—ah! how well I remember that blue frock with the flounces. There she is!"

"Annie Tackeridge?"

"Yes, yes, that's Annie. Is she not pretty, Phil?"

"I am short-sighted."

"Ah! so you are. Well, you will take my word for it, I suppose?"

"I shall judge for myself in a minute."

"Minute, eh?—you *are* in a precious hurry. What a chap you are to be in a hurry! Holloa!"

"What's the matter now?"

"There's an infernal puppy peeping through the windows of the next house at her—Marchmont House, as the man called it—I see him. I wish I had his head in my hands—I'd give it such a rapping against the wall!"

"A cat may look at a king."

"I hate to see fellows staring their eyes out at every pretty girl," said Frank, angrily, "let's have a stroll."

"Are you not going in?"

"Wait a minute. How awfully hot it is on the cliff! There's that chap still dodging behind the curtains, Phil."

"Never mind."

"Oh ! I don't mind—it only strikes me as very impertinent."

"I think that I can see my cousin Ellen at the other window."

"And there's old Tackeridge—he's coming out on the balcony with a telescope. He has seen us. Come on, Phil, we must put on a bold front and make for 640. Forward !"

Arm-in-arm, and both far from composed in mind, we crossed the road and advanced towards the house which contained the fair idol of Frank Esden's worshipping.

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### CHAPTER III.

No. 640.

MR. TACKERIDGE was the first to salute us, as we were ushered into the drawing-room of No. 640.

"What, Frank ! what an agreeable surprise, to be sure ; Mrs. Tackeridge, Annie, here's Frank come down to see us ; glad to see you, Frank."

Mr. Tackeridge shook hands in the heartiest manner with young Esden, and then shot a sharp glance from a pair of twinkling blue eyes in my direction.

Ellen Barchard's surprise was as great as Mr. Tackeridge's ; she ran towards me crying—"And cousin Philip, too, my dear, grave, steady cousin out of town ! how is papa ? how is Mrs. Holts ? Philip, let me introduce you." Introductions to each member of the Tackeridge family, observations on the weather, and earnest inquiries after everybody's health. I should have known Annie Tackeridge again, had I not been introduced to her ; her pretty face bore too close a resemblance to the bright one I had seen, five years ago, beneath the garden-hat, to fail me in remembrance. Annie Tackeridge, though the same age as my cousin Ellen—that was nearly seventeen—looked considerably her junior, she was smaller in stature, slighter in proportion, younger-looking altogether. The moment I was introduced to her, the thought flashed across me, that she was too young for Frank Esden—too much of a child for my hero of six feet.

But the hero did not think so ; he looked on her as quite fit to be his wife, and Annie Tackeridge did not consider her-

self too young to have that tall, strapping young fellow for a lover—was not too young, perhaps, to love him very dearly. However, I was not surprised that Frank Esden had fallen in love with Miss Tackeridge when I knew the young lady better, when I had seen what a graceful, attractive, and accomplished girl she was, and what a fascinating charm there was in everything she did.

No trace of plebeian origin in Annie Tackeridge—nothing in look or manner that suggested she was the daughter of a tradesman—she was too quick and clever a girl not to have acquired all those little arts and refinements which characterise “the lady.”

Mrs. Tackeridge, whom I had the honour of seeing for the first time that evening, was not a lady I was particularly struck with at first sight, neither was she a lady who improved on further acquaintance—at least, on my further acquaintance with her. She was a stout lady of forty years of age, with a face as broad as my Uncle Barchard’s, and with a double chin, that no alderman of the city of London could have equalled. She had been, possibly, a fine woman in her youth—some people would have called her a fine woman even then, and certainly if dress could add any charms to the ample surface on which it was displayed—she was one of the finest women I had ever seen in my life. But Mrs. Tackeridge, in her bright, flounced satin—Mrs. Tackeridge with her seven-guinea lace cap down her back, and her gold chain of Heaven knows how many carats-weight, round her neck, was still a tradesman’s wife, and looked no more the lady in her fine feathers than when she was Miss Shepherd, the butcher’s daughter, and young Tackeridge used to cast sheep’s eyes at her, from his new shop over the way.

Time is full of changes ;—the baker’s business had increased, and the baker had taken to himself the butcher’s daughter for a wife, and years had added to his shops and his money-bags, and set up for him a villa on Brixton Hill. The Tackeridge industry had been fittingly rewarded ; for here was the Tackeridge family in grand lodgings, on the West Cliff, Ramsgate, and the names of Mr., Mrs. and Miss Tackeridge were to be found in the “List of Visitors,” which an enterprising bookseller published every Saturday for the small charge of one penny.

Mrs. Tackeridge took more than a fair share in the conversation, and very grand and imposing she was over it. Mrs. Tackeridge addressed herself principally to me, too, which I



found irksome and fatiguing, as Frank Esden, Annie, and my cousin had formed themselves into a merry little group of three before the window. Mr. Tackeridge joined in with a few words occasionally, but being hard at work, in getting the right focus of a gigantic telescope which he had levelled at some distant objects out at sea, his remarks were principally delivered in an absent manner.

"Do you intend to make a long stay at Ramsgate, Mr. Farley?" asked Mrs. Tackeridge, after half an hour's discourse or more.

"No, Ma'am! I start for London the day after to-morrow."

"Ah! you young people must pay close attention to business—very right and proper. When you have made your fortune in the world, you will find it much more pleasant to come down here by the blue rolling waves and say, 'I have done my duty to my neighbour—now, let me enjoy a few leisure hours in peace and pleasure!'"

"Yes, Ma'am, so I think;" I said, politely.

"Time wasted is never regained; never, never," remarked Mrs. Tackeridge, slowly and solemnly, "and there's a time for all things. We, thank Heaven, have been prosperous in our undertakings and can now, let time—let time—ahem! my dear, how you are bothering with that telescope."

"Maria," said Mr. Tackeridge, looking round with one eye shut—Mr. Tackeridge was very fond of closing one eye—"I *can't* get this telescope right. Mr. Farley, do you understand these sorts of things?"

Blessed opportunity to escape from Mrs. Tackeridge, who loved a patient listener! I had been a prisoner before that lounging-chair, wherein Mrs. Tackeridge had sat like a fat Cleopatra, for nearly three-quarters of an hour. I had never had a telescope in my hands in my life, but I sprang cheerfully to my feet, and proceeded with a vast amount of confidence to adapt the glass to the vision of Mr. Tackeridge.

Whilst I was studying the principles of optics, Mr. Tackeridge said in his briskest manner—

"Farley, Farley, do you know that I have heard that name somewhere, Sir?"

"It's rather a common name."

I did not care to remind him of the little shop in Harp Street, and drag all the painful reminiscences connected with it to the light; there was no object in mentioning the same to Mr.

Tackeridge, therefore I returned an evasive answer, and continued spoiling the telescope.

As I stood at the window, by the side of the airily-attired Mr. Tackeridge—he was in the lightest of summer and sea-side costumes, and looked quite a zephyr—I became aware of a movement in the window-curtains of the adjoining house, and of a sly inspection being made between them. The inspection lasted scarce a second, and then the curtains closed again; but not before Frank Esden's eye, that had been wandering in that direction once or twice, had taken notice of the operation.

"You have an inquisitive neighbour, Annie," said he.

"Oh! next door," replied Annie; "yes, he is very rude, indeed. He is always looking into this room; we have to draw the blinds down sometimes, he stares so."

"Confound the fellow!" said Frank.

"Really, I do not see anything to confound, Master Esden," said Mrs. Tackeridge, loftily. "I never saw the gentleman next door staring in myself, and I think it's a delusion of my daughter's. He's certainly a polite and gentlemanly young man. He always lifts his hat to me—quite the gentleman, no doubt of it."

"Oh! I don't doubt it, Mrs. Tackeridge," said Frank, quickly; "I only said 'confound him,' because Annie said that he was rude."

"Annie is a child."

Annie looked at Frank and laughed; Ellen Barchard looked at Annie and laughed, too.

"Don't you find it very hot in these rooms, Mrs. Tackeridge?" asked Frank.

"Sometimes," replied that lady, ignorant of the drift of my companion's argument.

"I should think a walk on the cliff this beautiful evening likely to do you good now, Mrs. Tackeridge?"

After that remark, Mrs. Tackeridge was deep enough to see through Mr. Frank Esden.

"My dear lad," said she to Frank, "you would not ask me, if you were aware of the racking head-ache from which I have been suffering all day"—she put a fat white hand—every finger of which was decorated with a jewelled ring—to her forehead, "you cannot imagine how the sea-air affects it."

"Oh; a sea-breeze is the finest thing to cure a head-ache; now you try it, Mrs. Tackeridge, just for half an hour."

"No, no ; not to-night, thank you ; I shall stay in-doors to-night," said she, firmly ; "but do not let me detain any one here ; girls, get your bonnets on. Mr. Tackeridge, why don't you go out this beautiful evening ?—oh ! my head."

"I will not leave you alone, mamma," said Annie.

"Dear child, how kind you are to your poor mother !"

Frank looked grimly at the poor mother, but had no more to say upon the subject.

"Let me stay in to-night, Mrs. Tackeridge," said Ellen, "and keep you company ; Annie looks pale and requires a little change."

"I hope no one will stay at home for my sake," said Mrs. Tackeridge.

"But I would rather stay," persisted Ellen.

"I shall stay at home to-night, Ellen," said Annie, decisively.

"Annie," I heard Frank plead in a low tone.

But Annie took no notice of the appeal, and repeated her assertion.

"I wish you would—" began Ellen Barchard.

"Ellen," said Annie, "I shall not go out to-night, *now*."

I thought of a little girl who, once upon a time, would not go in doors, when a certain Miss Mackintosh desired her. I saw that the firmness of Miss Tackeridge had not entirely deserted her. She was all that was lady-like and graceful, but she *was* a little firm.

"Can't you manage that telescope, Mr. Farley ?" asked Annie's father.

"I think it will do now, Sir," I answered.

Mr. Tackeridge put the glass to his eye and took another look seaward.

"Can't see a bit !—worse than ever ; everything as black as my hat. I'll never, Maria," to his wife, "buy another telescope as long as I live, of an unbelieving Jew. Now, girls, why don't you go for a stroll ? Pooh ! it's very hot here. Frank, have a walk ?"

"Thank you, Sir ; but I—I feel just a little bit tired at present. You see it's a long journey by boat from London Bridge, and rather wearying ; but still," with forced alacrity, "I don't mind a walk, if you wish it."

Mr. Tackeridge did wish it. He ran out of the room and returned in less than a minute with a huge straw hat in his hand.

"Come along, Frank."

Frank, with a rueful visage, rose from his chair.

"Mr. Farley, will you join us?" inquired Mr. Tackeridge.

My cousin Ellen answered for me.

"I reserve Philip for my escort; we shall meet you on the cliff, Mr. Tackeridge."

"Mr. Tackeridge," said his wife, "you are never going out this evening, in that ridiculous hat and coat?"

"Oh, yes I am," replied that gentleman, "the band plays on the East Cliff to-night, and so all the swells may follow the fashion or leave it alone, just as it suits them. I'm only a baker, you know—no pretensions to rank and elegance, only a man of business, ha, ha!"

"Mr. Tackeridge, I beg you will not mention business in these apartments. I beg all mention of bakers and baking may be dispensed with—it pains me."

"Twaddle, twaddle," said Mr. Tackeridge, coolly, "I hate high notions, Mrs. Tackeridge, they don't suit me; I wasn't born for them. Do you know that I have half a mind to start a business in the town?—there is a shop to let."

"Don't annoy me, Mr. Tackeridge."

"What a deal we should save in apartments every season," Mr. Tackeridge continued, for no ostensible reason that I could detect, except the plaguing of his better half, "and what a sensation in the Isle of Thanet.—'Glorious News!—Down again!—Best Bread, 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.—ha, ha! Come along, Frank—pooh—it is hot!"

"I think," said Frank, solemnly, "that we are going to have a thunder-storm. I would not advise a long walk, at any rate."

Frank's last effort was a forlorn one, and with a half-desponding, half-appealing gaze at Annie, which Annie evaded by looking out of window, he followed Mr. Tackeridge from the drawing-room of No. 640. Ellen, after promising not to detain me a quarter of an hour, left me with Mrs. Tackeridge and daughter. Unaccustomed to the society of ladies, I had already experienced a difficulty in maintaining a cool deportment, during the severe trial to which I had been exposed, and upon my cousin retiring from the room, leaving me with two ladies, neither of whom appeared in the best of tempers, I was forced to take refuge in Mr. Tackeridge's telescope and appear deeply interested in its construction.

Mrs. Tackeridge, after another allusion to her poor head,

opened the conversation by remarking, that "Master Esden was looking very well."

"Mr. Esden is very well, I believe, Ma'am."

"So light-hearted—such a flow of spirits—ah ! happy youth, to have nothing on its mind."

What was Mrs. Tackeridge driving at ?

"You are both in the same office, I think I have heard Master Frank say ?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"And Charles Esden, too ?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Let me see, how long has Frank been clerk to Mr. Bar-chard ?" mused the stout lady, "nearly three years, I think."

"Nearly three years," I repeated.

"I suppose Master Esden's salary, now——"

"Mamma !"

"Be quiet, child—I express a supposition—I don't want to know how much money——"

"But mamma——"

"Annie, this constant interruption is excessively annoying. Will nothing teach you the duty to her who has studied and worn her life away to serve her child ? Oh ! my poor head."

Annie coloured scarlet at this reproof before a stranger. I blushed myself for her vulgar mother's absurdities, and made a desperate effort to turn the conversation by looking through the telescope at a black and yellow haze, which I informed Mrs. Tackeridge was a fleet in the Downs.

But Annie had changed the subject in another manner. She had crossed to the window facing Marchmont House, and drawn the blind down with a violence that nearly frightened the telescope out of my hands, and certainly could not have afforded any material relief to the poor head.

"My good gracious, Annie ! what are you doing ?—what is the matter ?"

"I'll never enter this room again, if that man next door does not desist from his ungentlemanly behaviour," she cried, stamping her little foot upon the ground.

"Oh, my head—my head—my head !"

Mrs. Tackeridge patted the article in question several times affectionately, settled the seven-guinea cap in a more secure position, lay back in her chair, and then gently closing her eyes, seemed anxious to resign the pomps and vanities of the world for ever and ever.

A silence ensued, broken at last by my cousin Ellen's entrance.

"Are you ready, Philip?"

I expressed myself quite ready, and after adieux to Mrs. Tackeridge and daughter, Ellen and I descended the carpeted stairs.

"Well, Philip, what do you think of them?" was Ellen's first question, as we sauntered towards the West Cliff, her tiny, gloved hand resting on my arm.

"Of whom?"

"The Tackeridges."

"It's hardly fair to judge; but"—said I, with hesitation, "I do not see much to admire in Mr. and Mrs. Tackeridge at present."

"I am sorry to hear it."

"Do you admire them, then?"

"They are very kind to me," she replied—I thought, evasively—"and Annie and I are almost sisters. You would admire Annie."

"Should I?"

"She is so kind, so good-hearted, so——"

"Hasty."

"Why, you cannot know a great deal about that, Philip."

"I may be doing her an injustice; I beg her pardon, Ellen."

"I grant it in her name," was the reply; "do you think her pretty?"

"Very."

"Do you think young Mr. Esden is fond of Annie, cousin?"

"What a question!"

"Annie will never own that he is, and Mrs. Tackeridge strongly denies it, but I have my suspicions."

"So have I."

"And although he did not call very often at Brixton, Annie tells me——"

"Not often!" I exclaimed, "almost every night, that's all."

"Then, like a romantic lover, he watched outside, along with the policeman, Philip."

"Hush, here he is."

Frank, alone, at a rapid rate came towards us.

"Why, where is Mr. Tackeridge?" exclaimed Ellen and I simultaneously.

"There he is, on that form, Miss Barchard, staring at the sea with one eye shut," said Frank. "I'm only going back a

moment—I've lost a—a—a pair of gloves of mine ; excuse me."

Frank was off again, and we continued our stroll along the cliffs. We had reached Mr. Tackeridge, who was lounging on a bench, and looking out at sea with one eye closed, in his usual knowing manner—watching the waters going "down again" perhaps—when I felt my disengaged arm touched from behind with a light, quick hand.

I turned and came face to face with John Tregancy.

"Tregancy !" I gasped forth.

"Ah ! it's worth coming to Ramsgate to meet Philip Farley. How are you ?"

He shook my hand heartily in his.

"I thought that you were at Oxford."

"Not yet. Grant me a little leisure, Farley, before I go back to a bigger school and bigger schoolboys."

He looked at me, at Ellen, who was withdrawing her hand from my arm with the intention of joining Mr. Tackeridge, then at me again. I took the hint implied by his sharp glance, and, in rather a clumsy manner, made the required introduction of John Tregancy to Mr. Barchard's daughter.

Tregancy had not grown any handsomer since our last meeting. His sharp features were still as dark and swarthy as when he first came to Cliff House Academy, and knocked the little boys about for calling him "Sambo ;" but still his dark face and his small, restless black eyes did not make him look less the gentleman. He looked older than his years, too ; few would have judged his age to be only twelve months in advance of my own.

"I have great pleasure in making the acquaintance of Miss Barchard," said he, raising his hat to my cousin, with a profound air of reverence, "I have heard a great deal of my old friend's 'cousin Ellen,' in my time at Sussex."

"Indeed, Sir."

Ellen seemed perplexed in what manner to treat John Tregancy, and evinced no small degree of embarrassment. Mr. Tackeridge, who was within ear-shot, edged round on his seat until he had brought my *ci-devant* schoolfellow within range of one blue eye.

"Do you intend to make a long stay in Ramsgate ?"

"I don't know, Farley, it is very doubtful. Are you engaged this evening ?"

"No—not exactly."

"Pray give me a call, then ; I am lodging at Marchmont House ; you will not refuse half an hour's chat with me, old fellow ? "

"Marchmont House ! "

I guessed the cause of my cousin's embarrassment immediately. John Tregancy was the gentleman interested in the family of the Tackeridges—the individual who took great pains to observe all that was going on at No. 640. Still he was an old schoolfellow. We all like to meet our old schoolfellows, and talk of what has gone away for ever ; therefore, I promised to look in at Marchmont House in the course of the evening, and spend half an hour with him.

John Tregancy, satisfied with my promise, apologised to my cousin Ellen for his unceremonious intrusion, and after pleading for an excuse his great attachment to myself—I did not remember any striking proofs of attachment at the moment—took his leave with a second elevation of the hat, and sauntered away in an opposite direction.

"Why that's the chap next door ! " burst forth Mr. Tackeridge, just half a minute before Tregancy was out of hearing.

"An old schoolfellow of mine, Mr. Tackeridge."

"Was he, though ? " replied he. "Well, he looks a dashing spark enough. Have you seen Frank Esden ? "

"He has gone back for his gloves."

"Ahem—yes."

Frank Esden shortly re-appeared. He had found his gloves ; he had evidently not been pressed to remain at No. 640 ; there was a vexed look on his handsome face that I had never seen before.

"I say, Phil, who's that dark-skinned gentleman you have picked up ? I saw him talking with you in the distance."

I informed him.

"Tregancy, eh ? What that schoolfellow of yours ? Queer looking fellow. What is he now, Phil ? "

"A gentleman with plenty of money, I believe."

"Ah ! what a grand recommendation to polite society."

"Now we'll start," said Mr. Tackeridge, jumping to his feet ; "now for a nice long stroll, eh, Frank ? "

"Oh ! to Dover, if you like."

"Come on, my lad. Pity to lose this beautiful evening."

Off marched Mr. Tackeridge, with his reluctant victim by his side.



Poor Frank. A long walk and Annie left at home ! This was a fine beginning to my friend's holidays. I only wished that I had been well enough acquainted with Mr. Tackeridge to offer myself as Frank Esden's substitute.

My cousin Ellen and I talked of Frank and Annie again, till the dusk of evening set in, and the stars glimmered overhead, and the lights at sea from beacons on the treacherous Goodwins showed faintly in the distance.

I was puzzled, too, concerning Annie and Frank Esden. It appeared to me that there was a powerful restraint on the young lady. It struck me forcibly that Mr. and Mrs. Tackeridge were not really pleased to see Frank Esden, and that in their sagacious heads a little plot was hatching to keep him and Annie at a distance. If I were correct in my surmise, how long had Frank been wilfully blind to signs that I had seen at once ? Still I might be in the wrong ; I would wait and watch. Ellen and I went back to No. 640, where I exchanged adieux for the night with Mrs. and Miss Tackeridge, and left word for Frank that I should be at my lodgings by ten o'clock in the evening, adding for his sake that he was not to hurry on my account.

A few minutes afterwards I was knocking at the door of Marchmont House.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### BROTHER AND SISTER.

"MR. FARLEY."

I entered a brilliantly-lighted room, in which were seated Tregancy and an elderly gentleman.

John Tregancy rose to greet me.

"My dear Farley, welcome to these make-shift quarters. Mr. Creaney," to the old gentleman at the table, "let me introduce my old schoolfellow, Mr. Farley."

Mr. Creaney rose and bowed.

"I wonder where Rhoda is," said Tregancy.

"Do you want me, John ?"

The door had opened noiselessly, and a third person had entered the room.

"Rhoda, I have a friend to make known to you—you have heard me speak of Philip Farley?"

Rhoda Tregancy advanced towards me, with a thin white hand extended, saying, "My brother's rival at Cliff House school! Mr. Farley, I am glad to see you."

We were shaking hands before our introduction. Miss Tregancy was evidently no admirer of forms; besides, I was many years younger than she, and, probably, but a schoolboy in her estimation; still her manners were very kind and winning, and I was prepossessed in favour of Miss Tregancy at first sight. Miss Tregancy, whose years had numbered twenty-six at least, was a tall and graceful lady. She resembled too much her brother in the face to be considered pretty; the features wore the same sharpened look, and the complexion was nearly as dark. Yet the face was a striking one—a face that men and women would have turned and gazed at in the streets. Rhoda Tregancy was not without traits of features wholly distinct from her brother's—the eyes in particular, although of the same bright blackness, as if fire were glittering therein, were as large, in proportion to the rest of her face, as her brother's were diminutive, and the mouth and chin were perfect.

There was a lady-like neatness in her dress too that was characteristic; everything she wore that evening was rich, dark, quiet, without a single colour predominant. There were no jewelled rings on her fingers, and a simple bracelet of hair, clasped round her right wrist, was the only ornament displayed.

"I have heard so often of Mr. Farley from my brother, that I have been quite curious to see the hero of his stories."

"The hero!" I exclaimed, "I am afraid Mr. John Tregancy has been indulging in his usual vein of satire."

"Not I," said Tregancy, lightly, "though I do not remember making you the hero of my histories *very* often; but my sister is always full of compliments."

That was the first sneer I had witnessed from John Tregancy since our reunion. I was sorry to perceive that he had not relinquished his old habit.

"Are you ashamed of speaking well of a friend behind his back, John?" said his sister, not heeding his remark.

"I would rather speak ill."

"I do not doubt it!"

"Come, come!" said the voice of Mr. Creaney, "don't be two silly children. Mr. Farley, pray take a seat."

"Well! what do you think of this cockney's Paradise?" asked Tregancy, twisting his gold watch-chain round his fingers, "does it suit your matter-of-fact soul, Mr. Farley?"

"I have seen little of the place at present."

"Ah! the less the better," replied Tregancy; "why we came ourselves, the Lord only knows; it's a grand assemblage of tradesmen and tradesmen's wives; but it suits Miss Tregancy."

"I am not too proud to mix with tradesmen, or their wives, although there are ladies and gentlemen, too, to be found here, if required."

"Are there?"

"But I am ready to return to London when it suits the convenience of yourself, or Mr. Creeney."

"My dear girl!" cried the old gentleman, "I am at your service at any time, or place; pray don't consider me. I am as ready to-morrow for the Cape of Good Hope as for Ramsgate sands. Do as you like my children, do as you like."

I thought of John Tregancy's remark when we came home together in the railway carriage. "One who lets me have my own way—a capital fellow!"

"I don't mind where we go," said Tregancy, "I shall soon be off altogether. There is certainly one thing makes the place bearable."

"What is that?" I asked.

"The very large number of pretty girls," he answered. "Almost every face you see is a fresh, handsome, happy one."

"Ah! you rogue! you rogue!" said the easy guardian.

"John has lost his heart at Ramsgate," said his sister to me.

"That accounts for my depreciation of the place, Rhoda. I hate to lose anything."

"But *your* heart is worth so little, John, dear," remarked Miss Tregancy; "what is the use of complaining about trifles?"

John Tregancy looked at his sister, but said nothing. Miss Tregancy turned to me and devoted the next ten minutes to a chat concerning Ramsgate and its visitors. I thought it strange at the time that I was more at home with the Tregancys and Mr. Creeney than I had been a little while before with their next-door neighbours, that I talked in quite a rational manner to John Tregancy's sister, and did not blush more than half-a-dozen times during the whole course of the evening. Miss

Tregancy knew more of the incidents that had occurred at Cliff House school than I should have given her brother credit for communicating—slight and trivial incidents, with which I have not troubled the reader, but which appeared to have prepossessed the lady in my favour. She knew the full particulars of my struggle with Tregancy for the first-class prize, and John had not been backward in informing her how he had won it, and appreciated it. "John is eager to gain anything which appears beyond his reach, valuing it only for the difficulties in the way."

"The charm is in the pursuit, fairest of sisters," said her brother.

"Rhoda," hinted Mr. Creency, "you have not finished my favourite symphony."

"We are not going to quarrel, Mr. Creency," said Tregancy, coolly, "why persuade my sister to take refuge in Erard?"

"You would lead Mr. Farley to think that we spend a very miserable life together, John."

"Instead of being a model brother and sister as we are," added Tregancy, "well, resume your interminable jingle, Rhoda, and leave me to talk with my friend here. Come on the balcony and get a little fresh air, Farley."

Tregancy stepped on to the balcony and I followed him after his sister had taken her place at the piano.

"Are you fond of the sea-side?" asked Tregancy.

"Very."

"I hate it and all the fashions that belong to it. Crawling about hot sands, listening to wretched bands of music, staring at an interminable waste of waters, and admiring bathing machines and dirty fishing smacks. Give me jolly old London!"

"Are you residing in London—I thought that you lived near Reigate?"

"Oh! I soon turned the current of events when I went home for good," replied Tregancy, "I bothered old Creency, and sulked, and flew into fits of passion, and teased Rhoda—I am rather fond of teasing Rhoda—until I found myself at a house in Eaton Square.—Miss Barchard your cousin?"

The precipitancy with which he changed the subject startled me, but I replied in the affirmative.

"Miss Barchard has a friend next door, what is the lady's name, Farley?"

"Tackeridge."

"Daughter of that Jack-in-the-box-fellow in the light suit and straw hat?"

"Yes."

"And now, who is *your* friend? Not a tradesman for a sovereign."

"No."

"In your office?"

"You make shrewd guesses, Tregancy. How well your sister plays!"

"My sister is half a genius, people say—but never mind *her*. Is your friend after the dark or the fair one?"

"I have hardly a right to answer that delicate question."

Tregancy laughed.

"I will find an answer for it myself. You have introduced me to one of the family, you know."

"Ah! true."

John Tregancy was curious concerning that family next door, and had I known a great deal concerning the Tackeridges instead of a very little, the result would have been about the same—he would have elicited every scrap of information on the subject.

When the symphony was over, Rhoda Tregancy joined us on the balcony.

"Now, Rhoda, you want to catch another cold, of course," said her brother, "take my advice and go in."

"No, thank you, John."

"Do you find the ladies of your acquaintance, Farley, fond of their own way?" asked Tregancy.

I thought of Ellen and answered—

"Not all of them."

"Cherish the paragons who are the exceptions to the rule then—they are very scarce."

"Do you find the gentlemen of your acquaintance, Mr. Farley, like my brother John?" said Miss Tregancy.

I laughed.

"No. My friend Tregancy stands alone," I answered. "In a school of a hundred boys there was not one to match him."

"How many were there to match Philip Farley?" asked Tregancy.

"Plenty."

"You are wrong there. But no matter," said he. "Let everyone speak for himself. I would rather stand alone than be one in a crowd."

"It depends on what the crowd consists, John," said his sister.

"No."

"A crowd of honest, persevering men, now?"

"I would keep out of the way."

"Ah! you are jesting," said Miss Tregancy, with a sigh.

"Think so if it please you."

Tregancy, as if tired of his sister's company, stepped into the room again saying—

"Come, Farley."

My natural politeness hindering me from taking so abrupt a leave of Miss Tregancy, I lingered on the balcony and looked at the still, dark sea beyond.

"Was my brother John so rude, unfeeling, and cruel as this, I may say," asked she, in a low tone of voice, "when he was at Cliff House?"

"Your brother has been a riddle to me all my life, Miss Tregancy," I answered, "sometimes I have fancied that he sought to mask a really good nature by an affectation of much that was bad, at other times—"

"I can guess the rest," said she; "how old are you?"

This was an extraordinary question, but I replied to it.

"You are very young—you speak like an older man. I wish you knew more of brother John. You must come and see him at our house in Eaton Square."

"Thank you."

"I have great confidence in you, and very little in my brother."

The subject was becoming painful to Miss Tregancy and embarrassing to me. Still she continued—

"Of all the boys my brother left behind at school he has only mentioned you—he must have been attached to you."

He had at least taken a strange way to demonstrate that attachment, but I did not tell her so.

"He has informed me that you were the coolest, as well as the most determined boy in his class—that only once in the whole year he put you out of temper, though he tried to do so half a dozen times a day at least."

"Ah! that was his attachment."

Miss Tregancy could not refrain from a low musical laugh at my rejoinder—a laugh that was ringing in my ears days afterwards.

"Any one who could reason with my brother and retain his

temper might work some good in him," said she, "but I have failed and my temper has failed too. I am a true Tregancy."

"My ears are tingling," cried Tregancy from the inside of the room, "that *tête-à-tête* concerns me, I know."

"Don't listen, John," said his sister, "you will hear no good, depend upon it."

"Now, Farley," called Tregancy, "come in to supper. If you were only a year or two older, I should have my suspicions of a flirtation outside there."

We re-entered the room. Supper had been laid in my absence, and servants were prepared to attend. This was placing me in an unenviable position. Lackeys to wait on me, a baker's son! My thoughts flew back to Harp Street. Singularly enough, whenever I have been placed in a position above me—whenever I have mixed, by accident or design, with the wealthy and the well-born, the past life and the past misfortunes of my father have risen vividly before me.

"I,—I really, my friend will wonder where I am."

"Not he," said Tregancy, "he's making love to Miss Barchard in the next house. I can see his shadow on the blind."

"But I—"

"But sit down," persisted Tregancy. "Rhoda, persuade this lukewarm friend of mine to stay an hour longer."

"I fear that I have no influence, John."

"No influence! How about the balcony scene, five minutes since?" asked her brother.

"Balcony scene. Have you read 'Romeo and Juliet,' then?" inquired Rhoda.

"Oh yes; why?"

"I did not know that *you* were fond of Shakspeare."

"Shakspeare? oh, yes! Ha! ha! I dote on Shakspeare, don't I, Farley?"

Miss Tregancy used her best efforts to induce me to stay, and I remained. Mr. Greeney, the amiable guardian, added his persuasions five minutes after I had already consented.

"Pray stay, Mr. Farley, I beg. My young friend John does not meet a schoolfellow every day."

Supper commenced and proceeded. I got through my part in it pretty well, despite a couple of footmen flitting, spectral-fashion, at the back, who startled me occasionally by appearing at my elbow, with a bread tray, a change of plates and so forth. I was out of my element, and everything was new to me. My Uncle Barchard, though a rich man, hated ceremony;

he was never happier than when he dined at a cook-shop in the City, along with the British public, and paid so much a plate for his dinner. As for a footman at his own table, he would have gone out of his mind. The Esden family had degenerated, and their ceremonies were of the past; therefore, this supper at the Tregancys was quite a rise in life for me. I soon grew accustomed to it. Miss Tregancy's manners would have set the most bashful youth at his ease; and it was Miss Tregancy of whom I had been especially nervous. John Tregancy took wine with me. Mr. Creeney, whose face was a stereotyped smiling one that began to aggravate me, took wine with me also, and I, with a dashing courage that was remarkable, challenged Miss Tregancy. Time passed away pleasantly enough, and the distant bells of the harbour struck their warning notes in vain. After supper Miss Tregancy resumed her place at the pianoforte. Mr. Creeney, in a kind of simpering ecstasy, sat and watched the rapid flitting of her fingers over the keys. John Tregancy and I talked a little of past times and a great deal of the future.

Miss Tregancy sang an English ballad, and I sat enchanted. John Tregancy sang and played too, in his turn, and in a style that certainly surprised me.

"See what a clever family we are, Farley," said Tregancy, whirling round on the music stool, to the imminent danger of the screw—"wonderful people, the Tregancys—what remains of them."

"I was not aware that you played."

"Oh, you are not aware of half my accomplishments. I shall go through a course of surprising performances when I get you at Eaton Square. And Mr. Creeney will be charmed to add to the general entertainment."

"Certainly, my boy, certainly."

"Mr. Creeney has a bass voice that would make his fortune if he had not made it already, Philip," said Tregancy.

"Indeed."

I looked at Mr. Creeney, who sat nodding his head to Tregancy's flattery, and smiling at me in a most affable manner.

"And really, bass voices—good *bass* voices I mean"—continued Tregancy, "are scarce articles in the musical market."

"Are they?"

"Come, Mr. Creeney, just oblige us with the 'Wanderer.'"

"Why really I—I—"



"Oh! no excuses. Rhoda, you will accompany my dear guardian, I am sure."

"If Mr. Creeney really intends singing," said Rhoda, with two small white teeth impressed in her nether lip.

"Of course he intends. What are you looking at me for?" asked her brother. "Speak out, Rhoda, I hate dumb motions."

"*You* really wish to hear Mr. Creeney, then, John?"

"Certainly I do."

"Shall I accompany you, Sir?" asked Rhoda, of Mr. Creeney.

"By Jove! it appears so great a trouble that I will accompany him myself. Learn everything, Mr. Farley, and then you will never stand indebted to your clever friends. Now, guardian, 'Forlorn I track—'"

Mr. Creeney, who was anxious to distinguish himself, struck up the "Wanderer" in one of the huskiest and most execrable voices with which a human being was ever afflicted. With not one note in tune, and without one effort to keep in time, Mr. Creeney went through the song with a degree of self complacency that might have been amusing, had not a sense of the pain his effort was giving Miss Tregancy checked me. John played on, introducing several extempore variations for the sole purpose of putting Mr. Creeney out, in which he succeeded to his own satisfaction, if not to his sister's or mine. Perhaps that was sufficient for John Tregancy.

After thanks had been tendered Mr. Creeney, Tregancy was anxious to persuade me 'to sing something,' and persisted in maintaining that I had a first-rate voice at school, although I did not remember trying its power once, during my whole stay at the highly respectable academy of Dr. Groves. I declined to entertain the company, of course, and shortly after rose to take my leave.

"Your friend has not gone home, I assure you," said Tregancy, drawing aside the blind and looking at the next house, the appearance of which negatived his assertion, for the lights were out in the drawing-room, and all was dark at No. 640.

"I am afraid that it is very late," I said.

"Have you far to go?" asked Rhoda Tregancy.

"The distance is not great, but I fear the locality will puzzle me."

"I'll give you my valuable assistance," said Tregancy.

Tregancy would not listen to any denial, and marched out of the room to get his hat.

"You will come to see my brother again, I hope, Mr. Farley?" said Miss Tregancy, placing her hand in mine.

"I shall have great pleasure in calling at Eaton Square, Miss Tregancy."

"Always glad to see a friend of John's," cried Mr. Creeney.

"Good-night, my dear Sir, good-night."

A hearty shake of the hands from Mr. Creeney, and then 'Black Jack' and I were outside on the West Cliff.

A figure that had been leaning against the railings of the next house advanced towards us.

"What Frank! I hope that I have not kept you waiting—I did not expect to find you here."

"It does not matter," replied he, in a deep voice.

"Mr. Esden—Mr. Tregancy."

Both young gentlemen raised their hats and regarded each other attentively—something after the manner of prize-fighters, who politely shake hands with each other before they begin their exhibition of fancy-work.

"Mr. Tregancy was kind enough to offer me his assistance in finding our lodgings."

"You are obliged to Mr. Tregancy," said Frank, coolly, "but it is late."

"Oh, I am a late bird," replied Tregancy.

"But—" began Frank again.

"My dear Sir, I hope that you will allow me to stretch my legs in the direction of your apartments. Do I intrude?"

"Oh no," said Frank, in a tone that implied the very reverse. Tregancy, however, would not take the hint, but linked his arm through mine and proceeded to accompany us.

I could see at a glance that Frank Esden was not in the best of tempers, and as he did not speak another word until we stood before the door of our own humble lodgings, John Tregancy must have seen it also.

"Do you lodge *here*?" asked Tregancy, with affected surprise.

"Not a palatial residence," broke in Frank—"not a Marchmont House."

"I see it is not."

"No bow-window for a convenient *observatory*," added Frank.

"No."

I saw Tregancy's eyes flash in our dark square, and was surprised that he, so ready at retort, had no answer save a monosyllable for Mr. Frank Esden. One more glance up at the

house, after which he said in a friendly tone, "Good-night, Farley."

"Good-night, Sir," he said to Frank, in colder tones, with a second elevation of the hat—considerably higher this time—which was returned with great formality.

"When we were in our double-bedded room, Frank Esden dropped on a chair with a crash, put his hands in his pockets, and stared at me.

"You're a nice chap, you are."

"What is the matter?"

"This is our first evening in the country, and we have spent it beneath different roofs."

"I could not refuse an old schoolfellow's invitation."

"The blackamoor!"

"He may be an old friend, as well as a schoolfellow, Frank."

"I don't think that, but"—jumping up and suddenly shaking hands with me—"I beg your pardon, Phil—I'm out of sorts. I could quarrel with a saint!"

"Anything gone wrong?"

"Has anything gone right?" he cried,—“think of that confounded Mr. Tackeridge taking me a walk of six miles, and bringing me back hardly in time to say good-night to Annie; and Annie, too, out of spirits, and so dull.”

"We can't always be in one humour."

"There's something in the wind. I wonder," he said, "if Mr. Tackeridge took that long walk to get me purposely out of the way. By George, it's the last walk he will ever take with me. I say, Philip."

"What is it?"

"I have made up my mind."

"To what?"

"To have it out to-morrow—'to be or not to be!'"

"One and twenty is not to be trifled with."

"Don't laugh—I'm in no laughing humour, Phil."

"I have done."

"Have you spent a pleasant evening, my best of comrades?"

"Very."

"He don't seem a very pleasant young man to me."

"Does he not? But then there was his sister—such a nice girl, Frank."

"Hollo! is it there?"

"No, no," said I, laughing and blushing, "Miss Tregancy is old."

"How old?"

"I should say, five or six and twenty."

"Ah!" said Frank, yawning, "is she like her brother?"

"There's a strong resemblance."

"Then she must be a beauty!"

"Everybody is not an Annie Tackeridge."

"Right, my boy," said Frank, "and now, as Lady Macbeth says, 'To bed, to bed.' I wonder what put me in mind of Lady Macbeth? Mrs. Tackeridge, perhaps. I say, Phil, do you like Mrs. Tackeridge?"

"Not much."

"Fancy facing her to-morrow with serious proposals for my Annie; isn't it awful?"

"It is, indeed."

"I think the old lady has a good heart, mind you; it only requires an effort to sound it."

"I hope you'll sound it to the right-tune to-morrow, Frank."

"I think I shall."

"Don't be too certain, Frank—the disappointment falls heavier when one is unprepared for it."

"But she cannot object. I only wish to be engaged to Annie—I don't want to marry her before I can keep her. God forbid!"

"But—"

"Besides, I have known Annie so long, Phil. And she loves me, or she would never have sent me this breast-pin."

He pressed it to his lips, forgetting that I could see him in the dressing-glass.

Poor Frank!

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## CHAPTER V.

### A LITTLE TALK WITH MRS. TACKERIDGE.

It was nearly twelve o'clock in the forenoon of the following day when Frank Esden and I made our appearance on Ramsgate Sands. Frank had his reasons for delay—he wished to find the Tackeridge family settled on their seats at that end of the sands which would be fashionable, if there were enough fashionable people in Ramsgate to make it so. I fancied I

could recognise on the sands many faces that I had noticed behind counters and at shop doors during my walk to business—faces that looked none the worse for fresh scenes and sea-breezes. I must confess to a partiality for Ramsgate, for the reason, perhaps, that Court Circular names are scarce on the “Visitor’s List,” and those of my own class come to the deep sands year after year to enjoy themselves, to set aside the cares of the counter and ledger, and take a little pleasure in this world, as well as their betters.

There is something exhilarating in the sight of two or three thousand people taking their ease at this Kentish watering place, giving loose to enjoyment, which is all the wilder and merrier because eleven months of the year are spent in close lanes and crowded streets—spent in the ‘stitch, stitch, stitch,’ with the ‘double thread,’ perhaps, spent over the chest-aching desk, in hot shops and noisy factories, in counting-houses and public offices.

Frank’s quick eyes soon rested on the group he was in search of, which was larger than he had anticipated, for John Tregancy, his sister Rhoda, and Mr. Greeney were of the number. Tregancy had made the best of his time and introduction, for there he was chatting in the most friendly manner with Miss Tackeridge and my cousin. Miss Tregancy and Annie’s mother were deep in conversation also, and even Mr. Tackeridge and the smiling Mr. Greeney had fraternised and were sitting side by side, taking it by turns to look through the large telescope.

“An extensive family circle,” said Frank; “the Tackeridges did not know Mr. Tregancy last night. This is sharp work.”

“I had to introduce Mr. Tregancy to my cousin yesterday.”

“Lucky you came to Ramsgate, Phil,” said he; “well, I must keep your tawny acquaintance from having the game to himself, at all events.”

We advanced towards our friends and were soon in the midst of them. The compliments of the morning having been exchanged, and Tregancy having shaken hands violently with Frank and me, and introduced the former to his sister and Mr. Greeney, we settled into two crazy chairs, which an old woman, with an eye to pennies, rushed at us with, in a frantic manner.

Frank, not to be misled again, had placed himself close to Annie’s side—how pretty she looked in her morning dress and hat!—and entered forthwith into the general conversation. I

took a vacant place near Miss Tregancy and Mrs. Tackeridge, favouring them at the same time with the novel and original remark of "a fine morning," to which Miss Tregancy and Mrs. Tackeridge assented, the latter kindly informing me it was "heavenly," without the "h."

What we talked about for the next half hour I have not a distinct recollection. I know Mrs. Tackeridge was extra lady-like that morning, with the intention of impressing her new acquaintance, that Miss Tregancy looked darker and stranger in the sunlight, and that her brother only required a woolly wig and a banjo to have made a first-rate Ethiopian minstrel. I was pleased to see, too, that though Annie Tackeridge coloured and bent her head over her library volume, and drew her chair slightly away from Frank's when he first took his place at her side, the smiles gradually brightened on her pretty face, and she was soon listening to all that he said, and paying no heed to the remarks of any one else, greatly to the dissatisfaction of her worthy mother. Ellen Barchard was left to John Tregancy, and he did his best to make himself agreeable to her. At school, Tregancy had been singularly fortunate in winning universal attention; and his efforts that morning were not without their effect on Ellen Barchard. I observed Mrs. Tackeridge with a greater degree of attention than the rest of the party, for her manner struck me as more peculiar. She had to sustain the part of a fine lady—always a difficult task with the good woman—to keep an eye on her daughter and my friend Frank, and to endeavour quietly to attract the notice of her lord and husband in the background.

Mr. Tackeridge's attention was directed at last to a rapid motion of his better half's parasol.

"My dear Maria," remonstrated Mr. Tackeridge, with the telescope to his eye, "I have had a great deal of difficulty in getting this telescope to act, and now you are interposing your parasol between the glass and the object of view, and I can see nothing but fringe."

"I wonder you are not tired of that ridiculous glass," said Mrs. Tackeridge, turning round for an instant, and winking both eyes at him in a very expressive manner. Five minutes afterwards, Mr. Tackeridge sprang from his chair.

"Frank, come for a walk?"

Frank looked up.

"No, thank you, Sir."

"Splendid breeze on the cliffs."

"I'm always nervous walking on the cliffs," said Frank.

"Inclined for a bath?"

"Mr. Farley and I bathed before breakfast, thank you."

Frank stuck as close to his seat as the sea-weed to the rocks in the distance.

"Mr. Tackeridge is so fond of a companion," remarked Annie's mother; "and a nice long walk, and if Master——"

"Perhaps Mr. Tackeridge will not object to my company?" said I, suddenly vacating my chair; "I have not seen anything of the country at present. I hear that it is a pretty walk across the cliffs to Broadstairs."

"So it is," replied Mr. Tackeridge, with a little confusion,—"great pleasure,—highly flattered."

Off went Mr. Tackeridge and I in search of the breeze on the cliffs. I believe that I had Frank Esden's blessing for the act, and it was my only consolation—my esteem for the rich baker being very small indeed.

We had a long walk, and did not arrive at Ramsgate again till two o'clock in the afternoon. I went straight to my lodgings and found Frank awaiting my return.

"I thought Mrs. Tackeridge would have asked me to dinner to-day," said Frank, ruefully, "but the idea did not appear to enter her head. Never mind."

"How long have you been at home?"

"Only a quarter of an hour. Treganey kept me in talk after the ladies had left the sands."

"Does that gentleman improve upon acquaintance?"

"A little. He's a queer fellow," answered Frank. "I say, Phil, he seems very anxious to ingratiate himself with the Tackeridge family. Do you think that I shall have a rival in that quarter?"

"You ought to know best."

"I shan't fear him. Yet——"

"Yet what?"

"Yet a rich man is always a formidable adversary."

"Do you think Annie Tackeridge a worldly girl, then?"

"No, no, but the mother."

"Ah! the mother. I fear she's the rock ahead, Frank."

"The rock on which I may be shipwrecked this afternoon. Farley, I want your assistance."

"It is yours in any shape, old fellow."

"Listen. Mr. Tackeridge and Annie are going to Walmer this afternoon to see some distant relatives."

"Shall you follow them?"

"No—but I shall call on Mrs. Tackeridge and have a little talk with her. Now, I want you, Phil, to come with me this afternoon, to take your cousin Ellen for a walk, a drive,—out on the balcony will do if Mrs. T. object to part with her. And then, *then*—heigho!—I'll chance it!"

"Remember what I said last night, Frank, don't be too certain or build too much on hope!"

"Oh! I see nothing to be afraid of—*Nil Desperandum!*"

We had a hurried dinner, or rather I had, for Frank quickly withdrew from the table and with an 'Excuse me,' began walking up and down the room.

"I really believe Ramsgate is twenty degrees warmer than London."

"Or else you are twenty degrees warmer, Frank."

"Perhaps that's it," said he, with a faint smile.

Frank's agitation increased as the time grew late, and when we were *en route* to No. 640, he walked silently by my side, with every thought concentrated on his coming interview with Mrs. Tackeridge.

At the door of the Tackeridge apartments he said—

"I have been trying, Philip, to get up a speech for the occasion, and now I have forgotten every word of it."

"The right words will come in the right place. Courage."

"Is it you who are one and twenty, or Frank Esden?"

"Frank Esden—but then Frank Esden is in love."

When we were ushered into the room on the first floor we found that Annie and her father had already departed on their journey. Mrs. Tackeridge was in the act of composing herself in her large arm-chair, and Ellen was preparing to read her comfortably to sleep with the last new novel.

"Good afternoon, ladies," said Frank, "we have called to tempt you to a stroll this beautiful day."

"Thank you, Master Esden, it's very kind of you, but I should die with the heat," remarked Mrs. Tackeridge; "my poor head is very weak to-day, and besides, no one goes out in the afternoon; it is so very plebeian."

I looked significantly at Ellen.

"Thank you, Philip, but I have promised to give an afternoon's reading to Mrs. Tackeridge."

Frank stood, hat in hand, regarding the stout lady. I could see the colour changing on his handsome face. He glanced at me and I touched my cousin on the arm.



"I have a message from your father. Will you step on the balcony a moment, Ellen?"

Ellen looked surprised, but followed me.

"My uncle will be down on Saturday, Ellen," said I, when we were beneath the verandah.

"You told me that yesterday, cousin—how strange and forgetful you are!"

"What do you think of my friends the Tregancys?"

"Miss Tregancy is very fascinating."

"And her brother?"

"Oh! how plain he is," she said, with a slight laugh.

"And—and Mr. Creeney?"

"I only exchanged a good-morning with Mr. Creeney, but he seems a nice old gentleman. It is very hot here."

"Shall I lower this blind?"

"No, thank you, I am going in."

Ellen made a movement to return to the drawing-room—I caught her by the sleeve of her dress.

"Stay a moment, Ellen. Frank Esden wishes to say a word or two to Mrs. Tackeridge."

"Oh!"

Ellen stepped back and I drew down the outer blind and excluded the sunlight from the balcony.

"How close it is," said Ellen, "I think that we shall have a storm to-night."

"Perhaps before," said I, with a motion of my hand in the direction of the room.

"How foolish of him to choose this afternoon."

"What day would have suited his purpose better, Ellen?"

"I do not know. Mr. Tackeridge has ambitious notions concerning Annie."

When we were silent we could hear the deep agitated voice of Frank Esden in the adjoining room. I felt my heart beating more quickly for my friend.

"Say something, cousin. This is eaves-dropping," said Ellen, blushing, and retreating to the uttermost extremity of the balcony.

"Frank knows we are here, Ellen; he does not lower his voice; he is not ashamed of his passion!"

"But cannot you talk of something—of my father, of the mills, of your friends next door?"

Thus adjured, I spoke of the mills, the Tregancys, and other topics which slowly suggested themselves to me, spoke in a

wandering, absent manner, that was disturbed every instant by a loud appeal of Frank's, or a sharp reply of Mrs. Tackeridge's. When I was silent, Ellen began in a rapid, almost incoherent manner, the relation of some trifling incidents that had occurred during her stay at Ramsgate, and I stared at her, and put on an affectation of interest which deceived neither her nor me.

But every word from within that room, where the bright hopes of the young lover were being extinguished one by one, came clearly to my ears, and touched my heart.

We tried not to listen, but we were both standing there with an interest in the question which was being discussed within; were both agitated in no small degree. We did our best to speak of things foreign to our minds; but it was a vain effort, and we gave up at last and stood silently waiting for the interview to close.

"No! Master Esden—or Mr. Esden, as you are one and twenty,—I cannot consent to anything of the kind. Annie is too young, too ignorant of the state of her own feelings—not quite seventeen years of age yet—pray consider."

"I own that she is very young, Mrs. Tackeridge," we heard Frank say, "but I do not ask to marry her just now. Let her be promised to me for five years—ten years, with full liberty to cast me off at any moment when she feels that she loves me less."

Mrs. Tackeridge, determined to have nothing to do with Frank Esden, changed her tactics as often as he appeared to fix her with his argument.

"My dear Frank, you know that I have every esteem for your parents—your family altogether—but times have changed, and brought misfortunes—ah, me, ah, me! And I really think Annie ought not to be tied to you, *engaged*, as you call it, —when it is extremely doubtful if you will ever be enabled to maintain my child, as Mr. Tackeridge and I *expect* her to be maintained."

"I will not marry her until I can show her a home as good as——"

"My dear Sir, you must consider everything a lottery in this world; to be too confident is to dispute the power of One who has the ruling of us all." I believe Mrs. Tackeridge cast up her eyes at the old-fashioned gas-chandelier during the delivery of that sentence. "No, Master—Mr. Esden—I cannot be wicked enough to allow Annie and you to consider yourselves engaged; you may never obtain the

position of which you are so sanguine, and Annie must not lose the best years of her existence; lose, in fact, the grandest opportunities of settling in life for the sake of a delusion."

"Well!" said Frank, with a sigh that might have been heard at Marchmont House, "I hope that I may come and see her as often as ever, Mrs. Tackeridge. I will not abuse your confidence."

"After what I have heard, Mr. Esden," replied she loftily, "I must desire you to think no more of my child; we shall be glad to see *sometimes* so old a friend of the family; but my daughter and you must be perfect strangers to each other."

"She don't wish that," burst forth Frank, with a vehemence that made the three listeners' hearts leap, "you can't sit there and tell me Annie wishes to be a perfect stranger to me, wishes to be free, and wait for a better chance of marriage than it will ever be in my power to offer her. I would have given her a home and a true heart, and without the last what does it matter if the home's made of gold? Mrs. Tackeridge, when Annie was a little girl I loved her, and now that love has grown with me, until every hope is centred in it, you seek to drag her from my sight!"

"Don't be violent, my poor head is distracted," said Mrs. Tackeridge; "I could not help you falling in love with my child, it was not my fault, it was not hers. I asked her only yesterday if——"

"What?" shouted Frank, as she paused.

"If she could leave her poor mamma alone to marry you, and indigence; and she said, 'No.'"

"I have not offered her indigence?"

"Keep cool, keep cool!" entreated Mrs. Tackeridge; "she said she loved me too well to ever marry without her dear mamma's consent, and considering that your salary is not large—may never be much larger—that your poor father, through the loss of his right arm, is totally incapacitated from getting his own living, and considering——"

"My father has nothing to do with the subject, Madam," said Frank, firing up, "my father—God bless him—feels his affliction more than anybody breathing; but I understand you—your consent will ever be denied me?"

"I think so."

"And your husband's?"

"Mr. Tackeridge is ruled by me in everything."

A bright thought flashed to Frank's mind. His last chance—his last appeal.

"If you would think, for a moment, Madam, of your early days—the days when you married Mr. Tackeridge and made your fortune *afterwards*, encouraged by each other's love, you would not be so hard on me."

An unlucky mistake for Frank Esden. Mrs. Tackeridge considered herself insulted.

"Well, I'm sure!" said she, choking with suppressed indignation, "to taunt me for being worse off than I am now. I—I——"

"You misunderstand me."

"You cannot gloss it over, Mr. Esden," said the lady, "the wound is much too deep. You *real gentlemen*," with satirical emphasis, "can never forget the base blood which springs from trade. Mr. Esden, I shall never like you again—never."

"Mrs. Tackeridge, I have one thing more to say."

"Well, Sir."

Frank had risen, and was standing by the door.

"I shall start this minute for Walmer."

"Good gracious!"

"Annie has won my heart, and she must give me my dismissal. I will not have it from her mother's lips. Say what you will, be cruel and unyielding as you will, I do not think that you have a right to crush the first and best affection of my heart. I will not own it if you have."

Forgetting me—forgetting his adieux to Mrs. Tackeridge and Ellen, Frank plunged out of the room, and a moment afterwards the street door slammed behind him.

Mrs. Tackeridge began to kick and plunge in her chair.

"Ellen, Ellen, oh, my poor head, my poor head!—stop him, stop him, he'll ruin all—he will see Annie and half kill her,—he will persuade her to—he's mad, I'm sure he is, oh! how faint I am,—where's the smelling salts,—where's my bonnet?"

Mrs. Tackeridge, forgetting her poor head and her faintness, struggled from her chair and rushed into an adjoining room.

"I'll telegraph to Annie,—I'll tell my dear child how the young villain has behaved to her poor mother. I will as I'm alive!"

Mrs. Tackeridge bounced out of the bed-room again, dragging her bonnet on her head and fastening the strings beneath her chin.

"Ellen—where did I put my shawl? Oh! dear, I had two pins in my mouth a moment since and I have swallowed them both!—Ellen *do* find my shawl, or the telegraph will go off without me!"

"Run after him, Philip,—persuade him not to go to Walmer, —tell him I will speak to Annie," cried Ellen.

Mrs. Tackeridge's excitement was too great to reply to my polite good afternoon, and I left her standing before the drawing-room glass, calling for her shawl and still dragging at the bonnet with her trembling hands.

Seeing nothing of Frank on the West Cliff, I hurried through the town towards the railway station, feeling certain that Frank's impetuosity would carry him in that direction.

I found him, as I had anticipated, pacing up and down the platform of the Ramsgate station.

"Frank," said I, touching him on the arm.

He stopped and stared me in the face.

"What do you want with me, Philip?"

"Don't be foolish. Look before you leap, Frank. You can see her to-morrow."

"I will see her to-day. Is that vulgar worldly woman to mar my whole life, and am I to stand by and patiently submit?"

"Don't go to-day."

"I am going directly. There's a train to Deal in ten minutes."

"What is the use of being headstrong?"

He did not answer.

"You may not find her at Walmer, Frank."

"I will find her. Trust me."

"My cousin Ellen begs you not to go—hopes that you will leave it in her hands."

"No, no," said he, firmly, "I will go—I must go!"

"Then I go with you."

"I will go alone. I cannot bear a soul with me."

"I *shall* accompany you, Frank."

"If you do, I will never speak a word to you in all my life again."

I looked him steadily in the face, and the stern set expression softened for a moment as he laid his hand upon my shoulder—

"Phi Farley, you must put yourself in my place to understand or feel for me. I am on the verge of despair, and only

one dear hand can pluck me back and bring me to my better self. I hope you will not come with me—I would hide my troubles—love troubles that half the world would laugh at—from the eyes of every friend. Don't come."

"Well, I will not."

"Thank you."

He shook me by the hand and began walking at a slower pace along the platform, I silently keeping step with him. He did not speak again till he was in the train and I was at the carriage window.

"Don't wait at home for me. This is your last night in Ramsgate, Philip. Look about you."

"Where shall I meet you?"

"At the pier-head, at ten o'clock."

"Very well, Frank."

The shrill whistle gave its one screaming note of warning, and the train moved on.

"Good luck, old boy!"

He gave a sickly smile as the train went clanking on its journey, leaving me to watch its departure along with a few stragglers, some railway officials, and a boy with the morning papers.

As I went out of the station methought I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Tackeridge going in at another door. I did not care to make sure of the identity, but walked slowly along on the shady side of the way.



## CHAPTER VI.

### AT THE PIER-HEAD.

"ELLEN said that there would be a storm to-night," I muttered, "it is likely." It was ten o'clock, and I had taken up my post at the pier-head of Ramsgate Harbour. A stifling summer night, the clouds hanging in masses over the dark sea, —the sea dashing with a roaring noise against the stone-work beneath me.

A quarter of an hour since I had had several Ramsgate visitors for my companions, but a few heavy drops of rain had sent them running to their homes.

The rain was coming down steadier and faster, and I was wondering if Frank Esden expected me to get soaked through for his sake, when the object of my meditations came striding towards me.

"Have you been waiting long?" asked he, in a husky voice.

"Twenty minutes or so. May I ask, Frank—what success?"

"Phil, don't ask me!"

He turned away, and stepped on a narrow ledge of stonework at the extremity of the harbour. I shuddered; his tall figure standing there, the wild look on his face, the position he had assumed, alarmed me.

"Frank!"

He moved a step or two back and laughed.

"Did you think that I was going to make a leap of it? Ha! ha! not quite such a fool—for a school-girl, too!"

"Are you ready for home? It is pouring with rain."

"Let it pour. I like rain."

"I can't say I do," I replied; "besides, it lightens. Look!"

"Phil Farley, you don't ask me how I got on at Walmer?"

"You have just told me not to make inquiry."

"Have I?" said he, absently—"well, no matter. I saw her, Phil; she treated me worse than the mother. She would hardly speak a word to me until I was going away, and then she said, 'I never wish to see you again.'"

"What message did the mother send by telegraph?"

"I do not know—I don't care. I don't care for anything now! Do you see over there?"

He pointed straight before him.

"Do you mean the Goodwin lights?"

"Beyond—beyond."

"I see nothing beyond—all is black."

"Ah, and so is Frank Esden's after life! Come, let us go home, Philip, if you are frightened of the lightning."

"I am not frightened," said I, sturdily.

"All is black!" he repeated to himself.

"I do not think Frank Esden is the man to mope to death for the love of a girl of sixteen—to give way to a maudlin sorrow which can afford him no relief."

"You will not see me crying my eyes out, I daresay," said he; "come, let us get home. Did you see that flash?"

"To be sure."

A rattling peal of thunder followed my last words. I set off

scampering down the pier, but finding Frank keep at his old pace, I stopped and suited my rate of progression to his own. I need not say that we were inclined to be damp when we reached our house in the back square.

"A pretty night for an appointment at the pier-head, Frank!"

"The best night in the world for me," he replied. "Phil, I start with you to-morrow by the early boat."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Not one more trial for Annie's sake?"

"For whose?"

"For Annie's."

"Curse Annie!" he shouted—"may she——" he broke down at last, and like a boy at heart as he was, buried his head in his hands, and sobbed out, as he rocked himself to and fro in his chair—"I don't mean that—I don't mean that—whatever becomes of me, God bless *her*!"

END OF THE THIRD BOOK.



## BOOK IV

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“‘My son, get Money,’ said a wiser Man than you or I, honest Reader. That is the precept, but he went no farther, leaving the business of *Committee Men*, *Ways and Means*, &c., to the peculiar Turn of Thought or Bias of Invention of every Individual *Money Getter*. Of all the Methods made use of to attain this great End, I believe it will be allow’d that he who gains his point the easiest way, is the wisest Person.”

*Tricks of the Town 1732.*

## CHAPTER I.

### "TAKING STOCK."

LET me resume this story, two years from the day on which Frank Esden reached his one-and-twentieth year, and what change have I to chronicle in the lives of friends, relations and acquaintances,—in the life of Philip Farley? But little to all outward seeming—scarce a sign upon the surface of many changes that have gone on below—changes of mind, of heart, of character.

Outwardly, the two years that have intervened have least affected Frank Esden. He appears as gay and light-hearted as in the hopeful days, when he was one and twenty, and had many presents given him. Unchanged in his affection to his father, mother, brother, perhaps to me—as full of humour as ever in the Thames Street counting-house amongst the clerks—as generous to a fault as ever, only a trifle more thoughtful when he is sitting by the fireside at home.

He speaks lightly and jestingly of Annie Tackeridge at times, as if to show his family and me how little he cares for her; how two years have cured his wounds and made him heart-whole. I fancy that the laugh at his boyish folly with which he favours us is a forced laugh, and suggests no sense of merriment, but I may be mistaken.

"She was only a child—just sixteen—ha, ha! what a fool I made of myself at Ramsgate, Phil!"

Still, Frank Esden is changed; there is a restlessness in his actions that renders him unsatisfied with everything he performs or attempts. He settles not down to one book, or study, not even to one game at cards, when we are all at home of an evening—he wishes to read when old Mr. Esden has closed one of his cherished volumes and looks inclined for a game at whist—he is anxious for whist or loo when his father has gone up stairs to the "library," and his mother is busy with her house-keeping arrangements—he stays at home during fine weather, and is pressing everybody to join him in a stroll when the rain drops are pattering against the window-glass.

He has not seen Annie Tackeridge since the quarrel. Annie

has been ill—has been improving her education at a Parisian Academy—has been visiting some country friends. Annie comes back to Wheatsheaf Villa at last; but Frank Esden never goes to see her.

No change to be seen in Mr. Tackeridge, when I happen to meet him at my Uncle Barchard's house. Brisk and lively Mr. Tackeridge is, of course, shakes hands with me in the heartiest manner,—almost inclined to cry with joy at meeting me in fact,—talks of the weather, politics, and trade, and skips off to some of his shops, and agitates the neighbourhood with "Glorious News!"

Little change in Mr. Barchard—grave, heavy, plodding, and business-like—getting stouter and richer every day—talking of money and of money's value, use, and power frequently—of the heart's affections, hopes and trials, never.

No change in Ellen, save that she is a young woman, whose face—

—————"Looks like a story;  
The story of the heavens looks very like her."

Gentle, affectionate Ellen, loving her father with all her heart, having a corner in that heart, too, for her cousin Philip.

And what of Tregancy and his sister—what change in my grand acquaintances at Eaton Square?

Tregancy is at college, spending money after his old school-fashion, and running up an extensive series of bills with Oxford tradesmen, after a fashion that will certainly astonish Mr. Greeney, if that gentleman ever chance to look over the accounts. Tregancy is friendly still, writes to me occasionally in an affectionate manner, comes to see me when he is in town, and asks me to dinner with him at Eaton Square, where Miss Tregancy is always glad to see me. Frank Esden and Tregancy are friendly towards each other when they meet, but Tregancy makes no advances to a further acquaintance, and Esden does not seek it.

When Tregancy is in town, he is partial to calling at the Dover Road on Sunday afternoons, and on learning that I am at my uncle's residence—he always forgets where my Sunday visits are paid—he comes with many apologies to Mr. Barchard's house, talks of, 'just looking in for a moment or two,' stays till late in the evening, and walks home with me to Newington.

Mr. Barchard receives Tregancy after his usual fashion, does

not appear very glad to see him, or particularly charmed with his conversation; takes his afternoon nap without any ceremony, and sometimes keeps a wary eye on him when he is speaking to my cousin Ellen.

And my cousin Ellen—is she glad to see him?—I think so, now and then.

Lastly, what change in me? outwardly, of taller stature, looking nearer one and twenty than a score of years, more strongly built than when I went to Ramsgate; inclined to have whiskers, to rush up like a Maypole, and be as tall as any of the Esdens—neither handsome, nor strikingly ugly—a pale-faced, "hard-headed" young man of business.

I have not swerved from the desk, the ledger, and the rows of figures which are added up day after day—I have so intently applied myself to the "books," in fact, that I have forgotten pleasure, sunk pleasure altogether. After business hours, I study hard in my first-floor back, at home; study figures still, read occasionally the lives of men who have sprung from small beginnings, and reached the apex of the mountain, and grow ambitious as I read. I take Uncle Barchard for a model—I listen to his talk of money and of money-makers, when we meet together on Sunday afternoons, until something of his nature becomes infused into my own, and narrows mind and heart. To make money—to become rich, is my hope for the future—I put by a few shillings every week from my salary and it is pleasant to see my store accumulate.

In the two years that have passed, all the romance of youth has been worked out of me—I am a matter-of-fact young man—cold, and stern, and calculating—nothing of a hero, a little of a miser. I have ever before me the picture of my father, who suffered and died for want of money, and it warns me to be careful. Before me, too, is the living portrait of my uncle, and it affords me an example. My uncle gives me counsel and encouragement; he is a rich man—rich by his own exertions—a man who maintains that he who is poor or penniless, has but himself to thank and is deserving of no pity. I profit by Frank Esden's disappointment, too; he was thrown aside by Mrs. Tackeridge, because his share in the world's goods was not equal to his love, and the world's goods become to me the first consideration.

Love, friendship, honour, in their places; but the golden idol before them all for honest men to worship!

These thoughts confine and cramp the little intellect I have,

but they keep me steady and persevering. No one, not even Uncle Barchard, knows I have such thoughts. I pay my way and spend my money with the rest, when there is occasion for it; but money-making in an honourable way, seems a profession worthy of a young man not twenty years of age—the age when youth in general dreams not of riches, but has more glowing visions to shed a radiance on a path strewn with many roses.

What, if the roses fade?—they have lived their life of summer, and sober manhood looking back upon romantic hopes, smiles at their disappointment, and at the tears shed over them when the heart was tenderer.

My sober manhood looked back, too, but saw no roses of fancy withered by the wayside.

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## CHAPTER II.

### A SUPPER PARTY.

FRANK Esden's birthday. The fifteenth of August once more. Just two years since the bachelor's party, at No. 6; two years since a little jewelled "forget-me-not" was found on the dressing-table of the brothers' room up stairs, a birthday gift from Annie.

"Many happy returns of the day, my dear Boy!" cried old Mr. Esden, as Frank came down to breakfast, "*many*, MANY happy returns!"

"Thank you, father, thank you."

"And here is a slight token in remembrance of the day, Frank, my Boy," added he, "of trifling value, but you will not mind that. We cannot always offer gold watches—ha! ha!"

He shook his son's hand warmly, and then placed by his side, at the breakfast-table, a turquoise breast pin!

I saw Frank Esden change colour as he took the breast-pin in his hand, and murmured some unintelligible thanks. The turquoise breast-pin of two years ago was a forgotten relic to the old gentleman, and he saw nothing of the visions which had been conjured up so suddenly.

I hastened to divert attention by my own small present—a silver pencil-case and note-book, I think it was that year—and

Frank took refuge in the change, and shook me by the hand, and offered me his heartiest thanks.

Mother and brother followed with some birthday tokens, and then the ceremonies of the day were over, and Frank Esden was acknowledged to be twenty-three years old.

At Frank's particular request there was to be no party that year; it was to be a quiet, dull day, and Frank was going to business as usual.

"You should have begun your holidays to-day, my dear," suggested Mrs. Esden.

"Oh! I don't care about holidays this year, mother. I should not know where to spend them, or what to do with them," he replied. "I shall imitate my steady friend yonder with the large mouthful of bread and butter, and take no holidays at all."

"And why don't you take your holidays, Mr. Philip?—come, come, Sir, there is a secret behind!" said Mrs. Esden.

"It appears to me the waste of a fortnight," I answered; "I can say with Frank, 'where am I to go, what am I to do?'"

"You are both looking very pale," said Mrs. Esden, peeping round the tea-urn at each of us in turn, "now, why not get your holidays at once, and run down to Ramsgate before the summer's over?"

"Ha! ha!" said Frank, "that's a good joke. What! gentlemen like me and Phil go to Ramsgate—the cockney's Paradise' as a certain Mr. Tregancy calls it—does he not, Philip?"

"Yes! I believe so."

"But my dear Frank——"

"But my dear mother," interrupted he, "don't talk of Ramsgate; I am not going. The Tackeridges are there, you know, and I might fall in love again with little Annie. Ha! ha! ha!"

Old Mr. Esden re-echoed the laugh till the tears ran down his cheeks. Frank was a capital fellow for a joke!

"I will tell you how I mean to celebrate my birthday, mother; I'll go and see Monsieur Vauclose."

"Who is he?" asked Mr. Esden.

"A conjuror, wizard, something or other, at the Theatre Royal West," said Frank, "and now, who'll join me,—father?"

"No, thank you, my Boy, you know late hours don't agree with me; and I would not advise you to go out to-night—your birthnight, too, Frank."

"As you please, father ; I don't care."

Immediately Frank resigned his project, Mr. Esden pressed him to change his determination. Frank was looking ill ; a change would do him good ; "go, my dear Boy, go !"

"And I'll join you, Frank, and so will Phil," cried Charley ; "we'll keep the birthday, after all."

"By George, we'll all go !" cried Philip, "and Kitty shall mind the house till we come back."

But Mr. Esden shook his head in dissent, and Mrs. Esden would not leave her husband alone all the evening ; "he would be so very dull !" Then Charley did not care to desert his father and mother for his own pleasure, and a fresh altercation ensued ; as for my offers to remain, they were set aside and laughed at. Yet I had a strong wish to remain, partly on account of the expense I should necessarily incur—you see, reader, what a miser two years' study of money and figures had made me—and partly owing to a dislike to enter a building which my poor Methodist father would have termed 'a sink of iniquity.' However, it was finally settled that Frank, Charley, and I, should pay a visit to the Theatre Royal West, and witness the wonderful performances of the celebrated Monsieur Vauclose, from 'the principal theatres of Europe,' of course ; a gentleman 'who had given his matchless entertainment before all the crowned heads of Europe,' of course, too.

So, after business was over at Thames Street, we set forth in search of pleasure.

"Shall we go in the boxes, Charley ?" asked Frank, as we were marching over Waterloo Bridge.

"The boxes," said I, "that is the best part of the theatre, is it not ?"

"Yes ! the aristocratic quarter, where we shall meet the Tregancys, and the Tackeridges, and other sprigs of nobility."

"He is laughing at us, Phil," said Charley, "our box-days are over. Do you remember, Frank, the private box we used to have every Christmas at old Drury ?"

"Yes !" replied Frank, "when we went with Mrs. Tackeridge and Annie. I suppose the old lady—ha ! ha !—would not like me to call her daughter 'Annie' now."

"No, very likely not," briefly responded Charley, anxious to drop the subject.

"What is the price of admission ?" I asked.

"Two shillings to the pit."

"That is dear, is it not ?"

"Dear!" said Charley, with a laugh, "why Phil, you surely are not afraid of spending your money?"

"Not I," was the reply, "it is Frank's birthday, and I am his man for box, pit, or gallery."

"That's right, Phil. I shall initiate you into all the vices of town in a few weeks," said Frank. "This is only the beginning."

"Oh! is it?"

"I shall lead you from wizards to the drama—from drama to the opera and the ballet afterwards. Fancy sober Phil Farley in a white choker and waistcoat criticising the pets of the ballet." Frank and Charley laughed at the idea, and I joined in their hilarity, though I hardly understood to what portion of natural history "pets of the ballet" belonged.

I doubted Frank Esden's power to draw me out very often on an expedition of pleasure. There was no temptation in it; I was going at that time purely out of compliment. I felt quite the gentleman, too, that evening; I had brought with me three golden sovereigns—hard-earned sovereigns—and though I did not intend to spend them, yet I had withdrawn them from my little hoard, and placed them in my pocket with the inward satisfaction of a man of capital.

The Theatre Royal West was open when we arrived, and the pit about half full of people. Before the curtain drew up on the wonderful hats, tables, and inexhaustible bottles, the house was nearly full, and Monsieur Vauclose made his bow to a tolerable audience. Whether Monsieur Vauclose was entirely out of my style, or my intense application to business had given me an utter distaste for amusement, I knew not; but certain it was that I never spent a more miserable evening in my life. The extraordinary tricks and delusions did not appear very extraordinary to me, and Monsieur Vauclose, in flowing robes, covered with heiroglyphics, roused not in me the faintest sign of interest or admiration. Frank appeared to enjoy the performance about as much as myself, for at the end of the first part he said—

"Heigho! I wish that I had gone to the play."

"It is rather dull," I observed.

"Shall we go home?" suggested Charley, with a formidable yawn.

"Oh! let us see it out," I replied, "I hate throwing two shillings away. Hollo!"

"What's the matter, Phil?"



"Nothing."

"Yes, there is. What are you looking at?"

Frank stood up, and looked eagerly around him. He sat down again suddenly, saying—

"I see; you need not have been so careful of my feelings, Phil."

"Who is it?" asked Charley.

"Annie Tackeridge and her mother in the orchestra stalls. By George! if I had been first row in the pit, I would have leaned over and shaken hands with them. Mrs. Tackeridge looks well with that 'poor head' of hers gorgeously got up for the occasion. Who's the old boy with them—a *baker*?"

Frank's spirits were rather exuberant after the discovery, he laughed noisily at every small joke with which the professor of legerdemain favoured the British public, and talked in so loud a voice to me and Charley, that some gentlemen indignantly vociferated, "Turn him out." There was a more than natural brightness in Frank's eyes, too, and Charley whispered to me to notice how flushed his face was. Yet Frank was certainly not suffering from depression during the second part of Monsieur Vauclose's entertainment; the sight of Annie Tackeridge and her mother appeared to have freshened him up for the evening; and if there was a little wildness in what he did and said, that was only characteristic of Frank Esden.

Charley looked anxiously at Frank as if his brother's manner puzzled him, and said to me in a low tone, "I can't make Frank out exactly, Philip; I wish we had not come to-night."

"He's only slightly excited; better to see him lively than downcast, because he has caught sight of his first love after two years' separation."

"I don't know that."

Frank stood up in the pit again, apparently interested in some manœuvring of M. Vauclose's with a pocket-handkerchief, and a globe of gold fish; but his position appeared to give considerable annoyance to the ladies and gentlemen behind him, who were also interested, and whose view of the proceedings he had entirely intercepted.

"Sit down! Turn him out."

Frank was in a very obstinate, or very absent mood, for he entirely disregarded the urgency of the appeal.

"*SIT DOWN*," roared three voices at once.

"Order!" vociferated a gentleman from the opposite side of the theatre, who evidently could see very well indeed.

Frank was decidedly in an obstinate mood, for he maintained his position till there was a small uproar behind him, till several heads in the stalls were turned in his direction, amongst them Annie Tackeridge's.

Down sat Frank.

"I made them turn round, Phil, that's all I wanted!"

"What did you do it for?"

"To show the worthy family that I was still in existence, taking my ease in the pit of a theatre, whilst they lolled in the stalls along with the gentlefolks and the orders. To show Mrs. Tackeridge that she was quite right in having nothing to do with me; that it would never be my luck to sit in the reserved seats, and watch the game of life."

"Silence. Order there!"

"If it had not been for you and Charley I should have been in the stalls," said Frank, suddenly becoming discontented, and still talking at the top of his voice; "it is not often that we trouble the theatre, and when we do, it seems we must sit in the pit along with the costermongers."

"Who are you calling a costermonger?" demanded an excitable little man at the back of Frank.

Frank turned round with an annihilating glance.

"Don't be foolish, Frank. Remember where you are," I whispered.

"And where the Tackeridges are," added Charley.

Frank resumed his original position.

"I am making myself a precious fool," he said in a low voice. "I don't know what is the matter with me to-night—drunk perhaps."

"Shall we go?" I asked him.

"No," said he, "I'll sit them out, Phil. She changed colour when she saw me, the jilt!"

"Be quiet. Do you want the people behind you to know your love affairs?"

"I should not mind that," Frank answered carelessly, although he was silent a moment afterwards, and allowed the entertainments to be peacefully and satisfactorily brought to a conclusion by Monsieur Vauclose's "celebrated imitations of animated nature."

"Come on! come on!" cried Frank, springing to his feet, before the curtain had descended, "they are going."

"Thank God you are!" grumbled the small man behind, whose feelings were still in a disturbed state.

Frank, paying no heed to the remark, forced his way through the retiring audience, and disappeared from the sight of his anxious friend and brother.

We found him, however, in the front of the theatre amongst the white kids, opera cloaks, coachmen and policemen.

"What are you up to now?" asked Charley, catching him by the arm; "I don't believe there ever was such a fellow—you are not going to speak."

"Yes, I am."

"All this seems very foolish to me, Frank," remarked I.

"But then you are very wise."

"What good will it do?"

"Here they come, and there's the carriage. Carriage," with a sneer; "why, it's only a hired brougham!"

Squired by the old gentleman came Mrs. Tackeridge and daughter. I saw the daughter glance round timidly when she stood beneath the portico of the theatre. How fair she was—how pretty!

Frank drew back.

"No matter, perhaps I had better not insult them by my company. Come Charley, Phil, let us go home."

He made no movement to retire, however; but stood and watched the party enter the brougham with a strange wistful look upon his face. It was not till the carriage drove away that he altered his position.

"No wonder that I loved her once," said Frank, moodily, "although she was too young for me—too young,"—with an unmeaning laugh,—"to know her own mind! Does it seem two years ago, since——"

He did not finish the sentence, but started off in the direction of home, at a pace which Charley and I found it difficult to keep up with.

We were destined to meet old faces that night, for near the opera-house we ran against John Tregancy.

"Well met, comrades," cried he; "how often do my friends wander westward, at this hour of the night?"

"Not very often, Mr. Tregancy," replied Frank; "we have been dissipating our time for once, at the West Theatre."

"Oh! where M. Vanclose entertains a select audience. Well, Phil Farley, when are you coming to Eaton Square?—run-away that you are."

"I shall give you a call next week."

Charley, with his old habit of reserve, had shrunk a step or two in the rear.

"That is your brother, is it not, Mr. Esden?" asked Tregancy, his sharp little black eyes detecting the movement; "I have had the pleasure of seeing you (to Charley), once, at Dover Road, I think."

"One Sunday, several months ago, I believe."

Tregancy shook hands with Charley so long and affectionately, that Charley coloured at his polite attention.

"I thought you were at Oxford," said I, to Tregancy.

"Alma Mater and I parted bad friends six weeks ago."

"Bad friends!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, I got tired of college, and college found fault with my behaviour. There followed a row in my 'Academy for young gentlemen,' and as they talked of expelling me, why I saved them the trouble."

"You will hardly know how to dispose of your time, Mr. Tregancy!" said Frank.

"Oh! yes, I shall; I never find time hang heavily on my hands."

"It is getting late," suggested Charley.

Tregancy's ears were as sharp as his eyes.

"Late! why life begins at this end of the town, Mr. Charles Esden," said Tregancy, "when the witching hour comes round, and the churchyards begin to yawn. Don't play Bernardo to us, and say 'tis now struck twelve, get thee to bed, Francisco'—excuse my *Shakesperian* allusions, Farley!"

I laughed.

"We are not going to part yet, gentlemen, I have a friend to introduce you to—quite a character."

The three of us began expressing our inability to join him that evening, and he stood looking with one of those mocking looks, which I had seen so often on his face at school—a look that would have lost half its power on any other countenance.

We concluded our apologies, and he said—

"So you must return home at twelve o'clock, like dutiful boys, to your papa, or else papa will not trust you out again by yourselves! But perhaps it is the night air that disagrees with you all, eh, Mr. Frank Esden?"

"No," replied Frank; "but——"

"But come along with me," said Tregancy, seizing his arm;

"I invite you all to supper. Surely you will not refuse me, for the sake of the scolding when you get home."

"Scolding!" said Frank; "I don't know what it means."

"Ah! you are a good boy!"

Frank could not endure much that night—he tossed his head with a proud air.

"We are with you, Sir; we accept your invitation on one condition."

"Oh! any condition,—I consent at once."

"That you will allow us to pay our share of the reckoning—we shall be happy to spend an hour with Mr. Tregancy, but not at Mr. Tregancy's expense."

Frank said it with an insulting air, I thought; but Tregancy had gained his object, and he replied with a laugh—

"Oh! gentlemen every one of us—all strictly independent and averse to obligations—well, it's the best principle—follow me, please."

We crossed the road, went a short distance along the Hay-market, turned into a showy looking café—passed through a crowd of stylish young men and young ladies—very stylish young ladies, I thought—and ascended a flight of carpeted stairs to a handsomely-furnished room on the first-floor.

Threading our way through a number of supper-tables, more stylish people and velvet-footed waiters, we made for a vacant place at the end of the room.

"Has my friend arrived?" demanded Tregancy, of an obsequious attendant.

"No, Sir; haven't seen him yet, Sir."

"Supper for five—what have you got?"

The person addressed appeared such a perfect gentleman, in his black dress-coat and pumps, that I was quite ashamed of Mr. Tregancy's authoritative manner towards him. But he bore it very well, he bowed and scraped, and flitted to a table, and took therefrom a small book, bound in scarlet and gold, and placed it in Tregancy's hands with a deep salaam. Tregancy, after glancing over the book, issued some directions to the waiter. Having taken our seats, I looked at Charley and Frank. Frank had taken up a fork and was sticking holes through the table-cloth, in an absent and destructive manner. Charley, grave as a judge, was watching the operation.

"It strikes me that we shall have to pay for this," I muttered.

"We are in for it, my boy," replied Frank, rousing himself;

"and that being the case, don't let us be surprised at anything we see or hear, at our splendid supper, or," with a curl of his lip, "at the *splendid* people who patronise these rooms."

"Considering that we have to pay our share of this 'splendid supper,'" observed Charley, "I think Mr. Tregancy might have allowed us a vote in it."

"Let him have his way," said Frank; "he wishes to astonish us."

Frank being out of humour again, set to work on the dainty white table-cloth with the prongs of the fork. It was quite time to remonstrate.

"Don't do that, Frank," said I; "don't put us to any unnecessary expense, there's a good chap."

Frank laid down his fork, and Tregancy joined us at the supper-table.

The waiters were soon busy, hovering round us with manifold dishes. I tried not to appear surprised, but I shuddered inwardly with the effort. What a wealth of good things to pay for! cold fowls, an uncut ham, several raised pies, pies with mysterious legs protruding from upper crusts, lobster salads, decanters of wine, and—Lord have mercy upon us—half-a-dozen of champagne—more than a bottle a-piece!

Up rose a spectral scene of the past before me, according to its invariable custom—No. 54, Harp Street, Bethnal Green, a little baker's shop, where the gas burned dimly, and the customers came in with dogs'-eared memorandum-books; some one behind the counter with a pale care-worn face—a face that I should never see again in this world!

The door at the end of the room swung open and fell back noiselessly, and a gentleman with very long hair came swaggering towards us. A gentleman with a thin face, pitted with small-pox.

"Vauclose!" said Charley.

"The wizard!"

When he was within a yard of us, he appeared to change again to a person better known to us—to a Mr. Grainger, who had disappeared from Dover Road one morning, leaving a nine weeks' bill unsettled.

The eyes of Mr. Grainger, or Monsieur Vauclose, roved over the faces of the four young gentlemen at the supper-table, and gradually lit up with recognition—shaking hands heartily with each, he exclaimed—

"Quite a surprise—quite an agreeable and delightful surprise,

I am sure!—Mr. Frank Esden, Mr. Charles, Mr. Farley, all my old friends—all old and valued friends of mine, Mr. Tregancy.”

“And of mine,” said Tregancy, in reply.

“Mr. Esden,” said Grainger, addressing the senior brother, “I have been thinking this very evening, of my old snug quarters in the Dover Road, and of a little bill that is preying dreadfully on my mind! I intend to look in next week and settle it.”

“Yes, yes, all right,” said Frank, hastily; “so you have adopted a new profession?”

“I have, Sir; but to return to——”

“Mr. Grainger, I will thank you to drop the subject,” said Frank, sternly; “I am sure our friend, Mr. Tregancy, can derive no amusement from it.”

“I am extremely amused, I assure you.”

Charley Esden gave a sudden turn to the conversation, by inquiring of Mr. Grainger, *alias* Vauclose, whether he found his new profession profitable.

“I get a full house when I give plenty of orders away,” answered Grainger; “singular, is it not? but still there is no reason to complain—a pupil turns up now and then—Mr. Tregancy, for instance.”

“Mr. Tregancy!”

“It’s as well to know everything,” said Tregancy, coolly; “and legerdemain is a first-rate accomplishment.”

“A noble art,” added Mr. Grainger; “and one in which Mr. Tregancy bids fair to excel.”

“I shall eclipse my master in time,” said Tregancy; “and what a proud day that will be for me when I open an opposition shop, and announce to an enlightened public that Monsieur Catchpenny—Catchpenny is a good name, is it not Vauclose?—intends giving his classical and oriental entertainment on April the first, 18——”

“Good—extremely humorous, our friend,” observed Vauclose, with a laugh.

“Oh! every one is an admirable Crichton, if his pockets are admirably deep, eh, Vauclose?”

“Ha, ha!”

“By the way, is it Vauclose or Grainger? You have an *alias* I hear.”

“Confidentially, my dear Tregancy, Grainger is the name; but I find a Monsieur Vauclose, or a Signor something or

other, succeeds better in my profession. Sight-seeing Englishmen always run after a foreigner."

"Ah! you are a man of the world," said Tregancy; "what a misfortune it is, that there are thousands of you in the City of London, all so far-seeing, and sharp,—all so infernally hard-up!"

Mr. Grainger laughed again; Tregancy was too convenient a friend and pupil to be offended with, and Tregancy knew that as well as the wizard. He paid money and lent money, for the delightful privilege of insulting Mr. Grainger, and the professor, glad to turn a penny in any honest way, pocketed the affronts with his fees for instruction in natural magic, and thought what a weak-headed young fellow he had to deal with.

We commenced supper, and personalities having been abandoned, Tregancy became a more agreeable companion, and Mr. Grainger began to shine forth as a wit and *bon vivant*. Grainger, or Vauclose, had seen a great deal of life, and was full of anecdotes of the stage and the world. If his anecdotes were a little scandalous, if there were a warmth of expression and description in them, still his listeners were four young men together, and young men are neither squeamish, nor easily shocked, when their heads are close together over their wine, and the wine has been flowing pretty freely.

Charley and I cared nothing for his anecdotes, were even sensitive enough to blush at them once or twice, but as we joined in the laugh with Tregancy and Frank, who were not slow in filling and emptying their glasses,—the former from habit, the latter from heedlessness—Mr. Grainger continued to afford us plenty to laugh at, and did not study refinement in his jesting.

Mr. Grainger drank the wine, too, like a fish, and was the first to be affected by it, and Tregancy kept replenishing the wizard's glass, and clapping him on the back at the end of every anecdote, telling him that he was the "drollest dog that ever lived."

Frank was also getting flushed and red in the eyes; the novelty of the scene and its excitement, the strange mood that he had been in all night—perhaps the thoughts of his first love—tended to keep his hand to his glass and the glass to his lips, and champagne tossed off without any heed to quantity *is* heady.

Reckoning that I had imbibed four glasses,—I had always an aptitude for figures, the reader remembers,—and finding



Tregancy and the wizard suddenly transformed to two Tregancys and two wizards, I had sufficient presence of mind to decline drinking more deeply ; and Charley, I was glad to see, followed my example.

But Frank guzzled down the champagne, growing less sensible with every draught, his headstrong nature leading him on to extravagance and folly.

It would be a rash assertion to say Tregancy was perfectly sober, but he was at least the best of the wine-bibbers ; he certainly talked in a discursive manner, was more personal and insulting, and was rather inclined to swear at the waiters for inattention to his demands ; but taken for all in all, he was a very fair specimen of sobriety, considering the circumstances.

"Are you ready for home, Frank ?" asked Charley, at last.

"Home ! all right, my boy ; home's the word."

"Who's mammy-sick now ?" asked Tregancy, pouring Grainger out some more champagne, and continuing to pour till a small cataract of that beverage was flowing over the glass, spreading along the table-cloth and dripping on the wizard's trousers, "who cries '*peccavi* ?'"

"It's very late," suggested Charley.

"What of it ?"

"My father and mother are sitting up for us, and anxiously awaiting our return," said Charley, boldly.

"Hear, hear, hear !" cried Tregancy, hammering on the table with the handle of his knife, "hear the good boy, who hates stopping out late, because it makes his pa and ma nervous,—hear, hear !"

"Hear, hear !" cried Grainger ; "that's Charley—hic—Charley—the devil take the fellow's name, what is it ?—that's Charley something all over !"

"Charley," said Frank, gravely, "don't make yourself ridiculous."

"Frank, you have had enough drink, come home."

"Frank Esden," said Tregancy ; "don't you hear your noble brother—how dare you disobey him ?—go home directly."

"How dare you taunt him, Sir," cried Charley, in an excited manner—he had had some champagne as well as the rest of us—"how dare you sneer at me, as if I was your inferior, or your tool !"

"Gently, gently," said Tregancy, in a soothing voice ; "Phil Farley, my boy," turning to me, "you'll have some trouble to get that young man home to Dover Road."

"Frank, let us start," I said.

"No," answered Frank, turning obstinate; "I shan't go home yet, I don't very often see life—I have been too dull a fool, and too moping an ass for the last two years, and I will stand it no longer. Tregancy, I am your man!"

"He's no milksop," cried Grainger, shaking Frank by the shoulder; "he's a marked card that's not to be forced into the fist of every greenhorn who sits in the pit. Frank, my fine fellow, come with us, we have more life for you—singing, and dancing, and everything that's jolly—haven't we, Tregancy?"

"I believe you—waiter, the bill?"

Whilst the bill was in the course of preparation, Charley and Frank were debating in an under tone, whether it was expedient or inexpedient to return at once to Dover Road—Frank strongly opposed to the former course, and deaf to all persuasion.

The bill being brought, Tregancy was quietly opening his purse, when Frank Esden, very unceremoniously, knocked it out of his hand.

"Please to remember the compact, Tregancy the gentleman," cried he; "fair play, fair pay."

Tregancy picked up his purse saying—

"Do as you please. I had forgotten."

Curiosity led me to draw the bill from Tregancy's side to my own. Heaven and earth, what a bill for a light supper!

"Six bottles of champagne, at fourteen shillings a bottle!" I repeated, as that important item met my eye; "is that correct, Tregancy?"

"I believe so."

"Damn it!"

That was the first time in my life I had ever given voice to a strong expression of indignation, and then I certainly swore heartily, for I felt the price acutely. As for the other items—no matter, they belong to the past; I have not forgotten them and never shall.

I took a malicious satisfaction in detecting two errors in the bill of one and sixpence, and ninepence halfpenny, and in having them immediately corrected; then we settled the account like heroes and marched down stairs, and through the lower floor into the dark street.

Grainger wanted to sing when he felt the fresh air on his sharp visage, but Tregancy swore at him for a bawling fool, and silenced him. Charley had pinned his brother by one arm,

and I had secured him by the other ; but Frank Esden was not to be led home against his will, and Tregancy's persuasions were stronger than our own.

With a wrench of both arms, Frank released himself from his friendly captors, and linked his arm in that of Tregancy's, saying—

"There, you two go home. You are younger, and less able to take care of yourselves than I am. Leave me with these gentlemen."

"Oh ! Frank, Frank," cried Charley, reproachfully.

"Oh ! stuff, stuff," cried Tregancy, "if you will break up good company yourself, don't be a wet-blanket to others' enjoyment."

Tregancy with his fiery eyes and dark face, looked that night like the evil tempter by the side of Frank Esden.

"Frank," said Charley, not heeding Tregancy's remark ; "are Phil and I to go home without you ?"

"Of course you are."

"Do you leave us for these men ?" asked his brother ; "do you know what evil there may be in their hearts, or what evil they may lead you into ?"

"My dear Charley, I don't care—my dear Charley, I have done with caring from this night. I took my last look at my better angel when that—hic !—carriage drove away !"

"Don't be foolish."

"Tell the governor that I'll be home early in the morning."

We reached Trafalgar Square—Charley's route and mine lay over Westminster Bridge—Frank and his new friends evidently intended to proceed in an opposite direction.

"I *must* go," said Charley ; "they are nearly mad at home by this time."

"Shall I stop ?" I asked.

"No ; you can do no good, and they may lead you into wrong—come, Phil."

"Tregancy," said I, sternly ; "think what you are doing—don't be wickedly reckless, or make him so."

"Oh ! he's right enough."

"Frank," I said for the last time ; "will you come home—your old father is waiting for you—*do* come, just for this once !"

He hesitated ; Tregancy muttered something, which did not reach my ears.

"Go home, boys, and leave me alone," cried Frank ;

"I am sick of my old life—I start with a new one to-night."

"This is your doing," said Charley to Tregancy.

"Do I prevent Mr. Esden accompanying you," said Tregancy in reply; "your brother is his own master, and can do as he pleases."

"Decidedly he can," said Grainger.

"Frank?" cried Charley.

"No."

The brothers went their separate ways—Charley with me to his home—Frank to temptation. When we had crossed the road, we stopped and looked back; but the blackness of the early morning had swallowed the revellers. London was silent and desolate; and the gas-lamps were glimmering in the empty streets.



### CHAPTER III.

#### RHODA.

THERE was a great change in Frank Esden after that night; he did not become wholly bad, but he gave up the effort to be good. John Tregancy helped on the work which that grim foe disappointment had commenced, and Frank grew more headstrong and heedless. I believe Frank Esden had changed two years ago, I had seen the alteration begin in him myself. From the night of the grand supper at the café, from the morning of his return with pale face and blood-shot eyes, his new life began. He met with no reproof from his parents; their sad looks were sufficient for the time, and days passed before he stirred out of doors of an evening, or looked up with his light laugh from the counting-house books. His boyish love for his father and mother did not seem to abate, though he paid little attention to their wishes, but went out and came in at all hours of the night. It was a great change to see in Frank Esden, yet Frank Esden was no worse—was perhaps better—than fifty young men out of a hundred. He lost his character for a steady and good young man; but he became neither a drunkard nor a profligate.

"A little wild, my dear—a little wild," would Mr. Esden observe to his anxious wife, after Frank had come home with the early morning's milk, or been "detained at a friend's on account of the heavy rain!" "all young men are the same—there is nothing to complain or fret about. He'll grow out of it, my dear. I was just the same myself!"

"Not when you came courting me, I hope!"

"Oh! no—before that, my dear," was the answer; "Frank's a very good lad—the best of Boys!"

"If you would only speak to Frank—just remonstrate with him, Esden."

"Certainly, I will."

Mr. Esden put down his book one evening after that, and made his first remonstrance. Frank bore the reproof patiently, was touched by his father's earnestness, and promised not to keep late hours ever again. Frank Esden kept his promise for a fortnight, and then certainly came home, once or twice a week, at a later hour than there was any excuse for. John Tregancy did not call to see me again after the supper at the café, the young gentleman had taken offence at my expostulations on that occasion, and was not desirous of my further acquaintance. By chance we crossed each other's path sometimes; once I met him near my Uncle Barchard's house, and once he called at the mills for Frank Esden, and both meetings were characterised by a degree of coolness on his part, which was far from satisfactory to my feelings.

All the affection in John Tregancy's nature,—or all the substitute for it—was transferred to Frank Esden; his study was to gain Frank Esden's confidence and friendship, and, as if there were a charm about him which less fortunate individuals possessed not, he succeeded in the endeavour, and left Phil Farley to his studies and his uncle's business.

It was near October when a letter came to Dover Road, addressed to me; letters were scarce articles with me; with the exception of an epistle now and then from my step-mother, I had no correspondents, and gave no trouble to the General Post Office, or the Dover Road postman.

The delicate hand-writing was strange to me; and I turned the letter over in my hands, and adopted the fashion of most people to whom letters are a novelty, looking at the seal, the superscription, and post-mark, and tantalising my curiosity by speculations concerning them. Finding guess-work an unprofitable occupation, I broke the seal and read:—

“Eaton Square.

“Miss Tregancy’s compliments to Mr. Farley, and requests the favour of an interview with him, on Thursday evening at 8 o’clock.”

This was a mysterious epistle. Why did Miss Tregancy desire an interview, now my intercourse with her brother was limited to a bow, a few freezing words, and a stiff good-day when we met. I had been mortified at the careless manner in which John Tregancy had thrown me off; having flattered myself that if Black Jack had really a regard for one person more than another, that person was Philip Farley. When Tregancy sought out Frank Esden for a friend, I had turned to the account-books and the eternal compound addition, with a sense of wounded pride that few would have supposed me capable of feeling. Perhaps part of that mortification was owing to the loss of Frank Esden also. With Frank Esden’s change of life had departed all his confidence; his pursuits and pleasures were unshared by me, and his friends were no longer mine. Charley Esden felt this change in his brother more acutely than I, for my feelings and sympathies were less readily worked on. There was something touching in Charley Esden’s love for his brother, and the jealousy with which he regarded Frank’s growing attachment to Tregancy, and, consequently, Frank’s alienation from himself, was not to be concealed.

My thoughts were of Tregancy and the brothers Esden as I hurried to Eaton Square to keep Miss Tregancy’s appointment. The brothers, Tregancy, and I, were drifting each a separate way—who would come off the best in the battle of life when our years were older, and our heads were greyer?

Miss Tregancy was at home—Miss Tregancy was expecting me, and I followed the footman up stairs towards the drawing-room.

The footman’s hand was on the door when Mr. Creeney suddenly darted from the drawing-room, and with a mysterious gesture of his hand, which was rather startling, silently waved the footman down the stairs again. Mr. Creeney, after hooking one finger in the button-hole of my coat, and gently closing the door behind him, said in a low voice—

“How do you do, my dear Sir, how do you do? You are quite a stranger.”

“I am very well, I thank you,” I replied; “I trust you are the same?”

"Thank'ee, yes."

"And Miss Tregancy and her brother?"

"Yes, yes! quite well—that is, pretty well considering."

"Considering?"

"My dear Sir, they are very strange children," said he, "there are not two like them in the world. Why their tempers are so bad, or they agree so wretchedly together, the Lord knows! I have always let them have their own way, and it has not done a bit of good. They are humoured in everything, and yet they quarrel—good Heavens! how they quarrel sometimes!"

"I am sorry to hear it," I answered, rather surprised at Mr. Creeney's burst of confidence.

"There has been such a—such a ROW between them this afternoon, too! Positively awful."

"Indeed."

"And about you, my dear Sir—actually about you!"

"I regret that I——"

"My dear Sir, the subject does not matter much; *they*," in a husky whisper, "go at it about anything, and yet Mr. Farley, from their childhood's days they have had their own way. I have never sought to irritate them by opposition to their wishes—never. And now by way of gratitude they are driving me out of my mind as fast as they can!"

Mr. Creeney had not acted wisely in leaving his wards to their own passions, instead of exercising his legal authority over them, I thought; but it was not my place to argue the point with the old gentleman, therefore I was silent.

"Rhoda—that is Miss Tregancy, of course—was desirous that John should remain at home this evening to receive you, and John, it appears, was—ahem—pre-engaged. John was not inclined to give up his engagement, and, as I said before, a—a ROW—I have no better word to express it at present—was the consequence. John has gone out in a towering passion, and Rhoda is far from well this evening. Hearing your knock," continued Mr. Creeney, "and Rhoda having fallen into a doze, I took this opportunity of meeting you here just to inform you of the state of affairs, and to prepare you for any excitability on the part of Miss Tregancy. After a row, Rhoda takes time to cool down, I assure you—so does John."

"I am sorry to hear that I have been unwittingly the cause of a dispute between Miss Tregancy and her brother."

"Hush! I think I hear her moving. Dear me! dear me! if she had had a good sleep, she would have got up cool, collected and rational. Hush!"

Mr. Creeney walked on tiptoe across the landing, turned the handle of the drawing-room door, and began to screw his head gradually through a very small aperture. He jerked it back suddenly.

"Oh! my dear, I did not know that you were awake."

"I have not been asleep," I heard Miss Tregancy reply, in a faint voice.

"Mr. Farley has come, my dear."

"Has he been here long?"

"Oh! no, just arrived."

"Where is he? Why is he not shown into the room? Has my *brother*," with a bitter emphasis, "given his orders to the contrary?"

"No, no! John has given no orders—he has gone out singing like a lark, and in the best of tempers. He soon gets over his quarrels—he's a good lad."

"Where is Mr. Farley?"

"He's—he's coming up the stairs with the footman now," said Mr. Creeney, waving his hand behind his back in an agitated manner, "hush! Rhoda, here he is. Ah! Mr. Farley, glad to see you, Sir. Hope you are in good health. How d'ye do? how d'ye do? That will do, James," addressing an imaginary lackey, "you can go down. This way, Mr. Farley. Rhoda, here's our friend Mr. Farley looked in. You will be glad to see him, I am sure.—Not a word about our little chat together, or I shall never hear the end of it," he whispered.

Slightly bewildered by Mr. Creeney's volubility, I entered the room. Miss Tregancy rose, and with the very perfection of grace, came towards me with extended hand.

"Mr. Farley, you are punctual to a lady's commands," said she, smiling, as I bowed over the delicate hand, "I have to thank you for the trouble you have taken."

"No trouble, Miss Tregancy. A pleasure to me which I wish that I could perform more frequently."

"What is to hinder you?" she asked, quickly.

"To hinder me!" I repeated, startled by her abrupt demeanour.

"Excuse me, Sir, I have no right to ask the question."

"I may say for answer, Miss Tregancy, that your brother and I have never been great friends or close companions, there-



fore I have no right to force myself on Mr. Tregancy's home or confidence."

"Ah! I wish to speak to you concerning that. Pray be seated."

Miss Tregancy resumed her place on the couch from which my entrance had disturbed her, and I seated myself at a short distance from her. Mr. Greeney, with his hands behind his back, stood at the window, looking through the curtains into Eaton Square.

Miss Tregancy paused several moments before she spoke again, meanwhile I glanced askance at her. She was looking ill, and her face was of that peculiar paleness which is only seen in dark complexions. There was a restlessness in her eyes too, which I had not observed before, and signs of the storm that had lately agitated her were plainly visible in the impatient tapping of a small foot on the carpet, in the half petulant manner with which she snatched a book from a side-table and began opening and shutting it with a rapidity that made me giddy.

"Mr. Farley," said she, suddenly, "have you and my brother quarrelled?"

"No, Miss Tregancy."

"You have had some words together, Sir?"

"I can scarcely say we have."

"You have remonstrated with him then—have tried to turn him from some foolish purpose?"

"Really, Miss Tregancy, if there is a coolness between your brother and me, I am almost at a loss to account for it."

"Almost," she repeated. "Ah! you are evasive. No matter, the coolness has arisen. I am rather bold in seeking to discover the reason which you are anxious to conceal. Excuse me."

"Miss Tregancy——" I began.

"Enough, enough, Mr. Farley," she said, "let that part of our subject drop, it is of little consequence. You will not own to this coolness between you and my brother, but John has not exhibited such delicate reserve. I have been speaking to him this afternoon concerning you."

"The subject was not worth your notice, Miss Tregancy."

"I expressed a wish to see you friends again, for I have long wished to see John Tregancy with *one* steady friend, at least. I told him so this afternoon, and his answer was worthy of himself."

"My dear Rhoda," said Mr. Creenev, in the humblest of tones, "I hope you will not excite yourself again to-day."

"Mr. Farley," said she, not heeding his remark, "you do not know how I have striven day by day, year after year to make my brother good. How I have mourned over his moral weakness, and at the strength of that evil nature which carries him away and makes a villain of him. He has been my only tie on earth since my poor mother died."

She dashed the book on the table and swept a shower of bright drops from her dark eyes with the same impetuous hand.

"Rhoda, my dear," cried Mr. Creenev, "*do* consider this has nothing to do with——"

"It has everything to do with Mr. Farley's visit," interrupted she, impatiently, "for he was my brother's best companion. Whatever my brother thinks of Mr. Farley now, I *know* that he once esteemed him. Ah ! once too, despite his own folly and wickedness, his sneers and taunts at everything, he could see merit in perseverance and energy—could even be influenced by a stronger, better mind."

"Miss Tregancy, you overrate my perseverance and energy, I assure you," said I, "moreover I have not had the power to influence John Tregancy for a single moment, since I first met him at Cliff House."

"If you had become his friend, had humoured him in those early days, what influence for his good might have been exerted now !"

"But little, Miss Tregancy."

"You were never interested in my brother—never sought him for a friend."

"Your pardon, Miss, but there is one thing forgotten."

"What is that ?"

"The difference of position between your brother and myself."

"Oh, that cant of position !" cried she, with flashing eyes ; "what has that position done for him and me, but made us miserable ? It has set me here without a friend, in a world of false professions—it has made my life a mockery. I have not had one day's true pleasure since I came to England—not one true friend, even in my brother."

Mr. Creenev, in a state of great excitement, kept shifting his position from one leg to another at the window, as if he were indulging in a novel kind of shadow dance for the amusement of the public in the square.

"My dear Rhoda, I can stand it no longer," cried Mr. Creenev, turning to her, "I shall go to the doctor's for a composing draught. You know what Dr. Simmonds is continually calling here for, Rhoda? You know he says it will make you ill and perhaps affect your mind. What is the good of giving way like this?"

"Mr. Creenev, if I disturb you, pray retire."

"I will—I must. I feel my head swelling like a balloon. Mr. Farley, pray excuse me for a moment."

Mr. Creenev trotted out of the room, leaving me in an unenviable position. These outpourings of confidence were far from agreeable to me, and I was even alarmed at Miss Tregancy's excitement. It was all strange and new to me, and it seemed so out of place. She calmed down, however, after Mr. Creenev's departure and said, slowly passing a hand before her face,

"You must think me a singular woman, Mr. Farley."

She did not wait for my reply, but continued :

"You will not think differently from others, Sir—from the doctor, of whom Mr. Creenev spoke, to the simple, weak-headed Mr. Creenev himself. I may well be singular," with a sigh, "when I have no one to love on the whole earth. My heart is preying on itself and withering away."

"You are depressed in spirits this evening, Miss Tregancy, you will take a brighter view of life to-morrow."

She shook her head.

"My efforts to reform him, my weak, yet passionate efforts, repel him whose love I have a right to claim—and in the crowd of *nine* people with whom we sometimes mingle, my dark, ugly face repels the world. I am alone!"

I sat staring at the carpet. I was a bad hand at offering consolation, and there was none to be given in this case—none that could afford Miss Tregancy relief in her present state of mind.

"Mr. Farley," said she, changing the conversation, "will you stay till John returns—till an hour when he may possibly return, at least?"

"With pleasure."

"You are my last hope for John."

I felt what a foolish, weak hope it was, but I did not seek to shake her faith again in my power over John Tregancy. Still I knew it was impossible to exert a salutary influence over the wildest and most stubborn young gentleman whom I had ever seen in my life or ever read of in a book.

"If you could induce him to stay at home of an evening, Sir—if you would only call of an evening now and then, and take him by surprise! His natural courtesy would not allow him to leave you, and you would become great friends!"

"Ahem!"

"My brother is getting eccentric, too; he makes me tremble—he takes such strange, wild freaks into his head. To think of his practising legerdemain with a mountebank wizard; taking lessons of a scamp who picks his pockets at every opportunity. Do you know this Vauclose?"

"I have seen him once or twice."

"Do *you* admire him?"

"Not at all."

"You are a keen judge of human nature for one so young."

"You flatter me, Miss Tregancy."

"I never flatter. Are you still with Mr. Barchard?"

I replied in the affirmative.

"Ah! you will be a great merchant some day."

"A long day hence then," I replied, with a laugh.

"The day will repay you for your toil. Remember my prophecy when you are a rich citizen of London, and the Tregancys are scattered or lost!—but enough of the Tregancys."

She rang the bell, and the footman responded promptly to her summons.

"Tell Mr. Creeney that I wish to see him."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Mr. Creeney appeared.

"I have recovered from my nervous attack, Mr. Creeney," said she, "and think that I can dispense with Dr. Simmonds' composing draught."

"Glad to hear it, glad to hear it," cried her brother's guardian, rubbing his hands vigorously together, "we will have some music now, or a game at whist—three and a dummy—eh, Mr. Farley?—I'm very fond of whist—so's Rhoda."

The evening ended pleasantly. Miss Tregancy became another being, the graceful, accomplished, fascinating being whom I had seen at Ramsgate.

"Alone," thought I, as I sat observing her, "how is it that no stranger from the crowd of *fine people* is not drawn to that attractive lady, forgets not her dark face in the witchery of her manner? Alone 'with a heart withering away,' yet so fascinating—so RICH! Where were the fortune-hunters—those far-seeing men whose eyes are not dazzled by beauty?—had she

repelled them, too ?—had she seen through their motives, and with her imperious look—how imperious and queenly she could look sometimes !—waved them to a distance ?”

The evening passed—vanished like a dream. Supper was over, the gilt time-piece on the mantelshelf was chiming twelve, and no John Tregancy.

Rhoda saw my glance at the time-piece, and said :

“ We are detaining you. It is a late hour and you have far to go.”

“ If you will excuse me,” said I, rising.

“ And you will come more often to see my brother, Mr. Farley ? I have great faith in you.”

“ I wish that I was deserving of it.”

“ Then you will come ? ”

“ Yes—certainly I will.”

So we parted, and I went home to Dover Road, my brain dizzy with thoughts of Rhoda Tregancy.

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## CHAPTER IV.

SHOWS WHAT A HERO I WAS NOT.

I KEPT my word with Miss Tregancy ; I went more often to Eaton Square. I met with John Tregancy now and then ; but as a general rule he was absent—at the theatre—at a ball, at a friend's ; had gone out and left no word when he would return.

The first time that I met him at his own house, there was a certain degree of friendliness exhibited, but the subsequent meetings were characterised by a coldness and rudeness, which a higher spirit than my own would have immediately resented.

As for the influence which the sanguine Miss Tregancy had believed that I might some day exercise over her brother, the fallacy of that delusion soon made itself apparent. Tregancy had found another companion—I will not say friend—in Frank Esden, whom he brought twice to Eaton Square and played off against me ; therefore as my position as a friend of the family was becoming peculiar and embarrassing, there seemed no rea-

son why I should not resign it, and scratch the name of Tregancy off the list of my acquaintances.

Yet there was a reason—a potent one—it lay in Miss Tregancy herself. She was always glad to see me—my presence, young as I was, ever appeared welcome to her in her dull, grand home, and I became her friend and confidant. I became fascinated by her attention, and with a fluttering at the heart felt the charm growing stronger every day. Disregarded by her brother and caring little for society, this strange slighted girl turned at last to me—she could not make me her brother's friend, she would make me her own. Doubtless, she thought that the difference in our respective ages—she was nearly twenty-nine, and I was but close on twenty—would check all invidious remark, and so her interest in me grew strong and sisterly.

Before Christmas, when I was twenty years of age, we were the best of friends; she had by degrees learned the story of my life—of the helping hand Uncle Barchard had extended to me after my father's death—of the benefactor he had been to that father in the last days of his life, even of my father's debt, and how I looked forward to paying it some day. I was saving for that purpose already—that purpose helped to make me careful of my money.

I have said already, that I was not a romantic youth, that I was a cool, calculating young man, of nearly twenty years of age—far from a hero. I had learned to love money, to value money more than it deserved, to make other, better feelings in my heart secondary to it—to become its slave. Thoughtful and observant, I watched Miss Tregancy, studied Miss Tregancy, and a dream of ambition began to usurp possession of my mind and to grow brighter as the days went on. Supposing John Tregancy's sister were to fall in love with me!—there was a void in her heart which was unnatural—she was not happy with her brother—she had few friends—she had talked of the cant of position—she was an impressionable young woman—she was interested in me! Supposing, after time had glided by, that I were to offer myself, a poor miller's clerk, for her young husband?—supposing I were to begin from that date to show her, that the youth of twenty found attractions in her dark face, and uncaring for the disparity of age—loved her with all his heart.

At her house, at my desk, in the counting-house, in my chamber, where my ambitious thoughts preyed on me and pre-

vented sleep, in the fevered, troubled dreams, when sleep came at last, the temptation to become rich by this sudden *coup-de-main*, was ever before me, and was ever gathering strength.

If I did not love her intensely and passionately, still I should love her after marriage—I should make her very happy, and her affection for me, her accomplishments, would make her young husband happy too. There was no one else to love, youth and beauty were not for me, youth and beauty such as Ellen Barchard's—my heart winced at that thought—made an idle dream for a clerk. Here lay my one chance in life, a chance that did not come to ninety-nine men out of a hundred, and even the hundredth with silly notions of love in a cottage with a bright faced Phyllis, might neglect filling his purse and becoming a respectable man in society, because there was too much romance in his disposition, to allow the world to say that he married for money.

Married for money! why would not money bring love and happiness enough for me? would not wealth—a fig for the moralists!—smooth the stoniest roads, clear away by cart-loads those briars and thorns which wound the bare feet of the travellers? I might never be “in love,” why should I neglect the one chance of bettering my condition?—how did I know that I was not in love with Miss Tregancy even?—I had had no experience in the sensations of the tender passion—*had I?*—I admired Miss Tregancy, and took great pleasure in her society.

Certainly I was never agitated—my heart beat no quicker in her presence—a touch of her hand did not feel like the touch of an angel's; I was as happy at the opposite end of the table as if I was sitting by her side; still I *might* be in love with her, only my blood ran colder in my veins than in most people's—Frank Esden's, by way of example.

So I thought, reasoned, flattered myself, into an attachment for Miss Tregancy, and finally determined to do all in my power, by respectful attention, by a hypocritical interest in all she did and said, by feigning that subdued fire at the heart, from which unshrived lovers suffer, to win on the affections of the heiress and gain her hand if possible. If I had been sixteen years of age instead of twenty, I should have made the venture—I was very young for Miss Tregancy, but I had the consolation of knowing that I looked considerably older than my years; whiskers had started into light of day, I was nearly six feet in height; and ah! how preternatu-

rally old had I become in thought. Not the oldness of thought of Tregancy, but of the miser whose lust is in gold, and whose belief in the happiness it can create is only to be shaken in the last hour when he looks back at the life he has enjoyed with his money !

And this love of money was my one great fault—it marred my every wish—it set a sordid value on every persevering effort—it depreciated the merit of being steady, sober, and earnest in my business. I learned the lesson day and night—it did not leave me in my pew at church, where I went every Sunday morning and evening, and thought myself so good !

As a general rule, men as they grow older become more fond of the world's goods, take greater pains to possess them, and are more affected by their gain or loss ; I was an exception to that rule ; I began early to dream of money's value, money's power, and I woke up at a later hour and found the withered leaves !

But I digress. I made up my mind to study Miss Tregancy, to try to love her—I was honourable enough for that—to endeavour to win her for a wife. Her consent lay with herself—there were no parents to consult, and if John Tregancy or Mr. Creeney had any objections to urge, Rhoda was her own mistress, and had a will of her own that was not to be easily subdued.

So with this great secret in my breast, I began my siege to Miss Tregancy's heart—not without a pang of remorse, which gradually grew weak, and died away at last. I made great progress too. Rhoda's frequent quarrels with her brother helped to render her more and more unhappy, and to pave the way for my professions of undying love.

I began to deceive myself in the belief of that love, too ; it justified my scheming, it kept my conscience from reproaching me. Had the sun not risen, or the power of the heart not exerted itself strangely and suddenly, I might have believed that love was true and deep. Thrown so frequently into Miss Tregancy's society, more and more fascinated, as we met more often, I took all signs of my own interest for affection, and went on justified with the pursuit. Seeing more of Rhoda Tregancy, I perceived how natural it was that she and her brother could not act in unison together. Thoughtless, impetuous, unaccustomed to restraint, Rhoda's was no nature to cope with her brother's irritable and cruel temper. John Tregancy spared no one when the opportunity presented itself, and he spared his



sister least of all. Her pride roused, her disposition soured by constant trials, she turned to me, and seeing one ready to obey her lightest wish, one who really respected and admired her—if it is any extenuation, my respect and admiration were true, and most intense—she became thoughtful, absent, more of the gentlewoman.

John Tregancy, naturally suspicious, soon had his doubts of the motive that brought me frequently to Eaton Square. Seeing him so seldom and yet calling so constantly, could but suggest to him one reason for my visits, and he set himself to thwart me. It was a false move on the part of Tregancy, for the strong dislike he began to exhibit towards me, roused the feelings of Rhoda in my defence, and made me of greater interest. His past coldness and reserve gave place to a series of studied insults that would have daunted me, had I been playing for a lesser stake, but as it was, roused in me only a spirit of resistance, which all his sarcasms could not overpower. He did not demand an explanation of me—affairs had not proceeded far enough between his sister and me to justify the measure; but by an insolent demeanour or a bitter flow of invective, he did his best to make my visits to Eaton Square irksome and annoying. In a great measure he succeeded, but I had never given up any project deterred by barriers in the way, and I was not going to resign my chance of marrying an heiress for all the John Tregancys in the world.

One night, a fortnight after Christmas, I found Rhoda Tregancy ill, Mr. Greeney in a state of great excitement, and John Tregancy absent. Miss Tregancy was not too ill to see me, and I was ushered into the drawing-room as usual. Rhoda was reclining on a sofa drawn close to the fire; there was a medical attendant in the room, he was leaning over her as I entered, with his fingers on her wrist. Mr. Greeney, twitching nervously at the elbows and knees, was sitting opposite, open-mouthed.

Rhoda's great dark eyes wandered towards my figure at the door, and I saw her colour change.

The doctor, regarding me attentively, kept his fingers on her pulse until I reached her side.

"Miss Tregancy," said I, alarmed, "I trust that nothing serious has occurred."

"Miss Tregancy," said the doctor, "you must keep quiet this evening, if you can sleep it will be better for you. The pulsation is very irregular, indeed."

"You will look in again to-morrow, Dr. Simmonds?" asked Mr. Creeney.

"Certainly."

The doctor, with a general bow, retired, and left me with Mr. Creeney and Rhoda.

"Mr. Farley, you are surprised to see me so suddenly an invalid."

"I am surprised and grieved."

I was playing no part that night. I felt what I said, more than I said; my heart was beating warmly for her, throbbing too with indignation against John Tregancy, who I knew by instinct was the author of her illness.

"My dear Rhoda, do obey the doctor for once in your life," implored Mr. Creeney.

"I am not excited now," said she; "I am very quiet, Sir; see how steadily I can hold my hand out—it does not tremble."

"Rhoda, do not talk. Mr. Farley, I am sure that you will not listen to her."

"Miss Tregancy, I am certain you will, for the sake of your friends, be silent."

"My friends!" said she, "I am without any; I have told you that before."

"Will not Miss Tregancy let me consider myself her friend?"

"My brother's."

"Yours."

She coloured again, and pressed her thin white hand to her forehead.

"I am very faint; leave me now, Mr. Farley, if you please."

I was at the door when she called me by my name.

"Mr. Farley, you will hear from John, I think; suspend your decision, your comments, till we meet again. Good-night. Mr. Creeney, will you ring for my maid?—oh, how faint I am!"

I left the room, and went slowly and moodily down stairs. In the passage Mr. Creeney joined me.

"Mr. Farley, will you step into the parlour on your right for one moment?—thank you."

When we were in the parlour, Mr. Creeney snatched at the button-hole of my coat in his accustomed manner.

"Mr. Farley, I don't know whether I am on my head or my heels. There has been the most horrible row to-day that I ever witnessed in my life—you see what it has done for Rhoda—she'll go out of her mind some day—I know she will."

"God forbid!"

"Mr. Farley," he blurted out, "will you be good enough not to call again, until you hear from me, or John, or Rhoda? The—the—I must call it row, I must, indeed—the row then has been solely caused by your visits here, and until Rhoda—that is, until I—no, that is not it either, but if you will—I mean if you will not—I hope you understand me?"

"Not very clearly, Mr. Creeney."

"Dear me, dear me, what is to be done? Here is John gone away—perhaps he won't come back any more—he swears he won't!"

"Mr. Creeney, one day next week, when Miss Tregancy is well enough to see me, I will call once more, unless Miss Tregancy expressly interdicts me."

"Oh! dear me—very well, then—do as you like!"

This was Mr. Creeney's invariable way of winding up his arguments and entreaties, and I was satisfied with the decision. I went into Eaton Square, and Mr. Creeney shut the door behind me. I went home with a troubled, discontented heart—troubled with Rhoda—troubled with her illness and her sorrows—discontented with myself.

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## CHAPTER V

### A NARROW ESCAPE.

NEXT morning another letter arrived at Dover Road, addressed to Philip Farley, Esq.

We were at breakfast, and Kitty came in with the letter in her hand.

"I say, Phil," observed Frank, "your correspondents are becoming numerous; is there any mystery brewing?"

"Oh! they are only love-letters," affirmed Charley.

"Philip never thinks of such nonsense as that, I know," affirmed Mrs. Esden, "Philip is a man of business."

"Ah! men of business are very sly," added Mr. Esden, "and they make love in such a business sort of way, that there is no telling whether figures or fancies are hatching at the brain."

The Esden family was in the best of spirits that particular morning. Frank had not been late home for a fortnight,

had always returned with me and Charley after the counting-house door was locked by Mr. Holts. Frank was making one more effort to be steady—the effort is no light one when the feet have once strayed—and Mr. Esden and his wife were beginning to hope that the wild oats had all been scattered to the winds. “Our Boy was a good Boy, the best of Boys—he would never go wrong, or become a profligate—there was great moral resolution in our Boy!”

Frank had his reward in seeing brighter faces round the family table; had he had more strength of mind, or been more inclined to moralise, he would have been a hero for this book—a pattern hero, such as my readers have met with now and then in—novels. But he was headstrong, very often reckless, and though he had too good a heart ever to sink to the bottom of the black stream, still he had always too feeble a resistance to offer to the follies of which the world was full.

If his love-story had begun at one and twenty, instead of ending there, what a different man would Frank Esden have been, and how many regrets might have been spared him.

But Frank was in the best of tempers that morning—resolved to be steady for ever and ever, and each member of the family was in the best of tempers also. The Esdens were very facetious concerning the letter which I had placed unopened in my pocket, and feigned to be deeply interested in its writer. Frank and Charley went to the office with me, laughing at my secret, and I laughed, too, though in a forced manner, that told of thoughts preoccupied with something deeper than their jesting. Thoughts of Rhoda, who was ill at her home in Eaton Square, of the result of my ambitious dreams, and of the hour advancing which might close them for ever by a word. What had John Tregancy to say upon that question? I had his letter in my pocket, and I waited my first opportunity to peruse the missive that would decide the next move in the daring game I, a boy of twenty, was playing.

That opportunity occurred in the office; when the clerks had settled down before their respective desks, and the scratching of pens began upon the paper, when Mr. Holts was giving out the bills at the open window to the carters—I may say here that I had risen in office over the head of that gentleman—when the great cash-book was open before me, and I could hide the letter in its leaves.

It was a curious letter, more friendly—more false for that,

too—than I had anticipated. It was written with a pen that had possibly been restrained from launching into a personal attack. There was no address or date ; Tregancy dashed at once into the subject with a forced familiarity.

“MY DEAR FARLEY,

“Your continued visits to Eaton Square, render it my painful but imperative duty to request you to abstain from calling there in future. It is a still more painful task to inform you that those marked attentions which you have lately paid my sister, have given Rhoda, Mr. Greeney, and me much unnecessary anguish. Setting aside the unreasonableness of your expectations, it may be as well to state that my sister’s want of self-command, her weakness of intellect, and delicacy of health, totally forbid a thought of marriage.

“Yours, truly,

“JOHN TREGANCY.

“PHILIP FARLEY, ESQ.”

“No, John Tregancy,” muttered I, crumpling the letter in my hand, and thrusting it back into my breast-pocket, “not at your bidding ;—you who study, and strive so hard to make her happy in that home from which you are fearful I should take her. My answer comes from Rhoda Tregancy, not from her self-willed brother.”

I wrote a reply to the letter in the same friendly spirit, assured him of my love for his sister—my love!—and expressed the sentiments of the above soliloquy in a polite but earnest manner. I sent the letter to Eaton Square—he had not given me his new address—and then, with a hand not quite so firm as usual, I turned over the leaves of the cash-book, and began my work for the day.

That day was destined to be disturbed in an extraordinary manner, and others besides myself to be disturbed with it in no light degree.

It was near twelve o’clock, the loaded waggons had gone upon their way, the clerks were busy in the counting-house, the engines were working their hardest in the mills across the yard, when a four-wheeled chaise, drawn by a small white pony, made its appearance on Messrs. Crawley and Barchard’s premises.

Mr. Holts put his head through the open window, and drew it hastily back again.

"Here are visitors to the mills, I think."

"What, again!" exclaimed Mr. Steel, the senior clerk; "both that new machinery! everybody in the world seems coming to see it."

"Any ladies?" asked Frank, "because I'll show them over the mill—here, out of the way, Holts."

"It's Mr. Tackeridge, two ladies, and Miss Barchard," said Mr. Holts.

Frank, who had cast a glance towards the yard, rushed back to his seat at the desk, snatched up his pen, and wrote on for dear life.

The noble steed of the Tackeridges was reined in before the window.

"Good-morning, Mr. Holts—good-morning!" I heard Mr. Tackeridge exclaim; "I have not brought you an order in a hurry this time. Hope I see you well, Sir?"

"Thank you, Sir, very well," answered Mr. Holts, charmed with the easy grace of Mr. Tackeridge's manner, but rather red and flustered.

Mr. Holts was almost as nervous as his worthy mother.

"Is Mr. Barchard here?"

"Well, Sir, I—I think I saw him go into the mill just now."

"Have you anybody you can send after him with my compliments?"

The carters were all absent from the yard; Mr. Holts looked round at his six companions.

"If any of you gentlemen would be kind enough? I—I am afraid I should make a mess of it myself. I am so weak in the knees when I am flurried. Mr. Esden?"

"Not I," said Frank, without looking up from his book, "I shall not dance attendance on Mr. Barchard's customers."

"I shan't go," said Charley, who had made his brother's real or fancied injuries his own.

Mr. Steele was too high in office, too important a gentleman to dream of going himself, therefore, it was left for me and the two remaining clerks to decide, and as one had come to the office in a hurry with a dirty face and yesterday's collar, and the other, who was quite the dandy of the establishment, was afraid of getting over flour, I was reluctantly compelled to take Mr. Tackeridge's message. Hat in hand I opened the door and went into the yard, where I was immediately hailed by that affable, pleasant gentleman, whose acquaintance I had had the pleasure of making a few years ago.

"How *do* you do, Mr. Farley? Why, we have not met for an age, have we? How well you are looking. What do you think of me becoming a ladies' man now, eh?"

I glanced at the ladies, making my bow to Mrs. Tackeridge, and daughter, and returning my cousin's smile.

"Is papa in the mill, Philip?"

"I believe so, Ellen. I am going to see."

Mrs. Tackeridge did not speak—she was quite the lady that morning, in her own opinion; her broad face wore its most grave and imposing aspect and her eyes were half-closed in the sleepest and most stupid manner possible. If I hated anybody in the world, it was certainly Mrs. Tackeridge. Annie, quite the lady too, in everybody's opinion, sat by my cousin's side at the back of the chaise, looking very pretty, though a little pale. She said something to me concerning "a fine day," to which I replied, "that it was a very fine day indeed," and then darted across the yard, and into the mills in search of Uncle Barchard.

Extensive alterations had been lately made in the machinery department of the Thames Street mills; in fact great improvements had taken place in the premises altogether, and rumour whispered that the cost had not been less than seven thousand pounds. Rumour affirmed, too, that Mr. Crawley had objected to so large an outlay, and Mr. Holts said—on what authority I knew not—that there had been a warm discussion on the subject, and Mr. Crawley, for the first time in his life, had interfered with Mr. Barchard's plans, and thought them very foolish.

Whether Mr. Holts was right or not did not appear; Mr. Barchard had gained his point at least, the engines were working on a new principle of action, and had become an object of interest to men of science, and to gentlemen in the trade, and scarce a day passed without a visitor or two to the model mills in Upper Thames Street.

I found Mr. Barchard, with a white blouse over his black coat, on the first floor of the mills.

"Do you want me, Philip?"

"Mr. Tackeridge does, Sir."

"Business?"

"I think not, Sir."

"Oh! dear, he wants to go over the mill. If there is one thing that makes me regret the improvements, it is the hindrance to business which a parcel of lazy people cause."

"Mrs. Tackeridge and daughter are there also, Sir."

"Humph! it's like their impudence."

"And Miss Barchard," added I.

"That is the effect of Ellen staying a week with those people," said my uncle, "she gets talking of the machinery, and rousing paltry curiosity. Here, you, Sir."

"You, Sir," was Ike Boxham, who occasionally worked in the mill, and tried to make himself useful. Ike Boxham, with a face like an unfinished clown's, waited for Mr. Barchard's orders.

"Ask Mr. Tackeridge and the ladies to be kind enough—ugh—to step this way."

"Pray allow me to—" I began.

"I want you a moment," said Uncle Barchard, quietly.

I remained behind in the mills, and Ike Boxham departed on his errand.

"I suppose they will want to see everything, though they'll understand nothing," grumbled my uncle, "so we had better go to the ground-floor."

We descended the ladder and waited in a long low-ceilinged compartment near the engine-room, from which a rattling noise was issuing that shook the building with an ague.

"Have you seen Mr. Crawley to-day?"

"No, Sir."

"Would you mind working hard at the books for a week or two, Philip? I mean harder than you generally do?"

"No, Sir."

"Or staying later in the evening?"

"I would prefer coming earlier in the morning, Sir," said I, with an eye to a certain house in Eaton Square.

"That will do. I want you to make out a clear account of every sack of flour that has left these mills for the last three years, the price of each sack, and the name of the buyer. I cannot trust anybody else. They are not steady enough, or, if you must have it," said he, reluctantly, "sharp enough."

"I will do my best, Mr. Barchard."

"I expect," said he, slowly rubbing his hands, "that we shall shortly have an alteration in this firm. Mr. Crawley is afraid of me speculating rashly—*me* speculating rashly!" he repeated, with a spasmodic smile, "and so a dissolution of partnership has been already discussed between us. I shall get on much better without him, Philip."



"I believe that, Sir."

"You are not a parrot, Philip," said he, "so keep this to yourself. I would not have it whispered in the counting-house yet for the wor—for five shillings."

Mr. Barchard took off his blouse to receive company. When the voice of Mr. Tackeridge was heard close to the outer door, my uncle turned round, and looked me full in the face.

"Is Miss Tregancy mad, Philip?"

For a moment my equanimity deserted me; the question was so sudden, and so extraordinary. What made him think of Miss Tregancy at that moment? why ask the question of me, who had never mentioned Miss Tregancy to him in my life?

"Mad! no, Sir."

"Eccentric?"

"N—no, Sir—not very."

"Why—"

Mr. Barchard stopped as the door opened, and the visitors advanced into the mill to pay their respects to him.

"Ah, ha! my dear Mr. Barchard!" cried Mr. Tackeridge, rushing towards my uncle with a precipitancy that threatened an affectionate embrace, "how do you do, Sir?—how are you, how are you?"

"Nicely, thank'ee," was the brief response as Mr. Tackeridge wrung my uncle's hard hand, and looked at him with tears in his eyes.

"I have come to see the improvements; always like to see how the world is getting on; always was a little curious, you know?"

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Barchard.

"Brought my wife, Mr. Barchard; Miss Ellen brought Annie, so don't throw all the blame upon me, if you object to ladies' society."

"Glad to see you Ma'am," said Mr. Barchard, getting his hand from Mr. Tackeridge, who seemed inclined to retain it as a souvenir.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Barchard," answered Mrs. Tackeridge, "at any time or place. I am sorry to intrude, Sir, at business-hours; but Mr. Tackeridge was anxious to drag me here,—and I really do not like machinery, it smells so nasty,—that you will excuse me, Sir, I am sure."

"Don't mention it Ma'am," said Uncle Barchard, staring hard at the lady, as if he hardly comprehended her.

"What a charming girl your Ellen grows," whispered Mrs. Tackeridge, confidentially; "she improves daily, she only wants a little more fresh air to be an angel. I wonder you don't take a villa, or something out our way—you must find London very smoky."

"I hate the country."

"But it would do Ellen a deal of good. And the Southwark Bridge Road—really my dear Sir—the Southwark Bridge Road for a gentleman of your position, you know."

"Know what, Ma'am?" asked Uncle Barchard, innocently.

Mrs. Tackeridge dashed off into a fine-lady speech, to which my uncle listened with eyes fixed on the dusty floor, and with an air of abstraction on his visage, which said little for his polite attention. After the conclusion of the speech we proceeded to the inspection of the improvements in the Thames Street mills, Mr. Barchard acting as showman to the establishment. My cousin Ellen had checked my movement of return to the counting-house by saying—

"Are you anxious to get rid of us, Philip? How are we to get up these tiresome ladders without a gentleman's assistance?"

"I shall be happy to offer all the aid in my power."

"You did not dine with papa last Sunday, Sir, I hear," said Ellen, "how was that?"

"Perhaps," remarked Annie, in a whisper, not intended for my hearing, "for the reason that his cousin was staying at Wheatsheaf Villa."

Ellen laughed, and waited for my answer.

"I called at Mr. Tregancy's in the evening," said I, in explanation.

"There must be an attraction there, cousin Philip. Has Mr. Tregancy only one sister—the lady we met at Ramsgate?"

She did not think that there was any attraction in the Miss Tregancy to whom she had been introduced then, and I felt inclined to be offended. However, I replied "that Mr. Tregancy had but one sister," and then hastened to divert attention. We went slowly from floor to floor of the mills, each full of a white blinding mist; through the large dusty compartments where wheels were spinning round eternally, and straps were running over them, and going from roof to basement and from basement to roof, in a never-ending see-saw; where wheat was being ground to powder, and the powder falling into agitated sieves; where pallid spectres were flitting to

and fro and going up and down traps like stage ghosts, and getting in the way occasionally, and flouring a black velvet mantle of Mrs. Tackeridge's in a very unseemly manner.

"Pray mind the machinery, ladies," said Mr. Barchard, in warning tones, "we have not quite finished yet, and the fencing is at present in an imperfect state. Mr. Tackeridge," with an elevation of his voice, "don't go too near that wheel, Sir!"

There was a wheel near Mr. Tackeridge, that was whirling round with a velocity which would have had that gentleman's sandy head off in half a minute, and Mr. Tackeridge, whose insatiate curiosity had placed that head in jeopardy, jumped back with alarm at Mr. Barchard's voice, and alighted on a pair of tender feet, the property of his respected lady.

"Oh! good Lord," ejaculated Mrs. Tackeridge, with a fine expression of agony on her countenance; "oh! my poor feet—the wretch has crippled me for life!"

"My dear, I hope I haven't hurt you."

Mrs. Tackeridge smiled murderously at him.

The better half of the speculative baker did not improve in temper after her husband's clumsiness; but depressed in spirits limped sullenly about the mills, snapping up her daughter or Mr. Tackeridge when occasion offered.

The examination of the improvements had nearly reached an end, we had descended to the engine-room, and were listening to a grimy-faced individual's explanation of certain parts of the machinery, when I saw Annie Tackeridge turn pale. I glanced towards the door, Charley Esden was entering the engine-room.

Charley bore a strong resemblance to his brother, and that resemblance struck home, as with his head very high in the air he marched towards Mr. Barchard.

"You are wanted directly, Mr. Barchard."

Mr. Tackeridge, with a beaming face, hoped that Charley was in good health, and offered him his hand.

Charley was "quite well, thank you;" but could not see Mr. Tackeridge's hand, he looked so straight before him.

Mrs. Tackeridge bowed stiffly, Charley returned the bow without a curve in his backbone. Annie's hand, which for "auld acquaintance sake," had stolen from her mantle, stole back again, at the frigid demeanour Frank's brother had assumed.

"How's your father, Mr. Charles," inquired Mr. Tackeridge,

not to be abashed, "and mother?" he added, as a bright after-thought.

"Quite well, thank you;" with a bow to Miss Barchard.

"And—ahem!—Frank?"

"Quite well, thank you," repeated Charley automaton fashion.

Mr. Barchard excusing himself for a moment retired from the engine-room, and Charley prepared to follow his employer.

"And how do you like this—this sort of business, Mr. Charles?"

"What business, Mr. Tackeridge?" said Charley, halting suddenly.

"The flour business, as I may say?"

"Quite well, thank you," said Charley, for the fourth time.

This constant repetition, combined with young Esden's lofty air, had the effect of disconcerting the Tackeridges at last; the head of the family coughed, and turned to the engine-man; Mrs. Tackeridge sniffed at a smelling bottle as if the noise of the machinery was too much for her "poor head;" and Annie, still pale and thoughtful, moved slowly away from the unfriendly group.

There was a large wheel—a new unfenced wheel—spinning round at some distance from the engine, its rapidly moving straps and bands communicating with the busy wheels above stairs. Annie with gaze directed at her feet moved straight towards it and no one seemed to heed her. Suddenly there was a piercing scream from Ellen that blanched every face. The engineer flung up his arms, and yelled "keep back!" but Charley Esden had already seen the danger, and springing forward, had caught Annie tightly in his arms. The wheel went whirling round and round, as if sudden death was nothing, and business must be attended to, come weal, come woe, and a long slip of Miss Tackeridge's mantle went one revolution, and then dropped.

The awful moment passed, we looked into each other's face, at Annie Tackeridge, at that which had been so near the wheel of fate, and said, "Thank God!"

Annie, bewildered, glanced at the torn mantle, at the pale faces round her, at the terrible wheel, and then the danger from which she had escaped rushing to her mind with all its horrors, she fell back in Charley's arms, and fainted.

"Is she hurt? is she hurt?" cried Mr. Tackeridge, dancing

round Annie and Charley. Mrs. Tackeridge, not yet restored to the faculty of speech, stood and gasped painfully.

"She is safe, Sir," I observed; "she has only fainted."

Charley was kneeling on the floor supporting her, Ellen was unfastening her bonnet.

"A glass of water, Philip—quick!"

I rushed out of the mills, not heeding the cry of "what's the matter?" from a dozen men who were tumbling over one another in their hurry to get down stairs, crossed the yard, and darted into the counting-house with breathless haste.

"Water, water! Where's the water-bottle? Miss Tackeridge has fainted."

A book fell with a heavy bang to the floor, a high stool tipped over with a crash, and Frank Esden had vanished. I followed immediately with the glass of water, but before I had reached the scene of action Frank Esden was in his brother's place supporting Annie's head, and casting a fierce look of defiance at Mrs. Tackeridge, who was coming to her senses.

"Let her be! let her be!" he cried, wildly, as Mrs. Tackeridge made a movement to take his place, "will some one tell me what has happened—Philip, Charley? Keep back, Madam. I will not give her up!"

"Oh! my dear child. Annie, Annie; oh! my poor girl."

By the aid of Mrs. Tackeridge's scent-bottle, an extempore fan of Mr. Tackeridge's hat, and the glass of water, Annie's eyes slowly opened to the light.

"I am better now," she said, faintly; "mamma, will you give me your hand."

Mr. Barchard, carrying a chair, came as fast as his weight would allow into the engine-room. Frank, after placing his fair burden in a seat, stood a few paces distant, with his left hand grasping his right wrist, and with his eyes fixed on her he had loved so passionately once upon a time.

Five minutes' explanations and congratulations on Miss Tackeridge's narrow escape, everybody talking, and few listening, Annie leaning back in the chair, Frank regarding her.

"I can walk to the chaise now, mamma."

Frank advanced.

"May I ask Miss Tackeridge to lean upon my arm? Your mother appears too weak and agitated to assist you."

Annie saw her old lover for the first time, and the colour, which had been slowly returning to her cheeks, fled back again.

"Mr. Esden," said Mrs. Tackeridge, with more real dignity than she had hitherto assumed, "this is cruel and ungenerous."

"I beg your pardon," said Frank, hastily drawing back. Variable as the wind, however, he dashed forward the next moment as Annie, leaning heavily on her mother's arm, made a step towards the door.

"For once more, in all my life—in all my life, Annie!" cried he, offering her his arm.

"Thank you, Sir, but——"

Her voice failed her in excuse. Frank was at her side, his hand had already taken hers and drawn it through his arm. She did not resist, as courteously and tenderly he led her to the chaise, his careful eyes watching every step she took. He stood near her when she was in the chaise by her mother's side, and Ellen had taken her place by Mr. Tackeridge; but he did not say a single word. Four whiter faces—unless they were from spirit-land—never were in one vehicle before.

"Shall I drive to the doctor's?" asked Mr. Tackeridge.

"No! straight home," murmured Annie. "I have only a headache. I shall be glad to get home!"

"Not another visitor to my mills, if I live till doomsday, and lose every customer I have," growled Uncle Barchard, as the chaise began to move.

"Good-bye," said the hollow voice of Frank, addressed to no one in particular.

Annie's lips moved, and something was muttered faintly in reply

"Where's Mr. Charles?—where's Mr. Charles?" asked Tackeridge—"thank him for me, and all of us. Tell him we shall be always—ahem, ahem!"

The chaise went on its way, leaving a crowd of workers at the mill-doors, the heads of Mr. Steel and clerks at the counting-house windows, Mr. Barchard, without his hat, in the centre of the yard.

"Come, that's enough," said the latter gentleman, roughly; "time is money, and you are robbing me by wholesale. Ugh! what a narrow escape. It might have been my Ellen!"

The crowd of gazers dispersed, the clerks' heads at the windows disappeared, the mill engulfed the workmen.

Frank Esden remained unmoved.

"Mr. Esden, did you hear an observation of mine just now?" said my uncle.

"What observation?" asked Frank, without turning his head from the mill-gates.

"Time is money."

"Is it?"

"And you are wasting it, Sir," said Mr. Barchard, sharply.

"Mr. Barchard," said Frank, wheeling round at last, "I could not make another figure to-day to save my situation or my life. I must go out. Give me five hours, and keep my holidays—the lot of them! I cannot stop here now. I'm half mad, I know I am. Where's my hat?"

Frank ran towards the counting-house.

"What a fool that young man is getting," remarked Uncle Barchard, looking after him.

"I'll tell him that he may have the half-day, shall I, Sir?" I said.

"He'll take it, if you don't."

"I'll do his work, Sir."

"Humph! Put down in the time-book half a day to Frank Esden, Philip."

"Very well, Sir."

"I'll deduct it, mind you. You may tell him so."

Frank, hat in hand, re-emerged from the counting-house, and, before there was a chance of telling him anything, and without the slightest idea whither he was going, or what he was going for, went off in his old headlong manner.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### COUSINS.

At a late hour that night Frank Esden came home to Dover Road, bringing with him all the morning's excitement.

The sight of his old love had heated his brain, and disarranged all his new projects of settling down and becoming—oh, so steady!

"Ah! Phil," said he, when I ventured to argue the case with him one day, "better see the world, drink a little deeper, and keep later hours, than go melancholy mad. Excitement is my element now, and I can't do without it. I have a brain that was never the most cool, and if there's not quicksilver

in my veins, why there might be for all the difference I feel."

After a pause, he said :—

"I feel impatient, reckless, callous, Phil. I don't care for home, or the wishes of those in it, and as for Annie, it is astonishing, my boy, how I have got over that nonsense about *her*; I do not give her a thought from one week's end to another.—By the way," he said with an earnestness that made me smile, "have you heard how she is?"

"Very well now, I believe."

"I'm glad of that—not that it matters to me or concerns me you know, quite the contrary. Charley was just in time, dear old fellow." He gave a shudder at what might have been!

"You would never have had a rival again, Frank."

"Don't talk like that."

"If there remained a spark from the old flame, Frank," said I, "it ought to have kept you steady that day of her escape."

I ought to have been thankful, eh?"

"Yes."

"Thankful she was spared for some fortunate rival with plenty of money—ha! ha!"

"You would rather have had a hundred rivals than——"

"That'll do," interrupted Frank; "perhaps I would not. How's Miss Tregancy?"

"Pretty well, thank you—that is, not pretty well, I called at Eaton Square yesterday evening, and heard that she was better."

"Pretty well,—not pretty well,—better!" echoed Frank, with a laugh, "you are a droll youth for twenty years of age—not quite twenty, is it?"

"Oh! yes, quite twenty, now."

"You don't mean to say that Black Jack Tregancy's sister has made an impression on your flinty heart, Phil?"

"I make no confession."

"Jack Tregancy tried to sift me a few weeks ago about it, but there being nothing to discover from me the gentleman was disappointed. You fly at high game, my noble friend,—mind you don't come down with a run!"

"Where is Tregancy?" I asked.

"Oh, we'll turn the conversation by all means," said Frank; "Tregancy is in the country. Gone for a month's trip, I believe."

"Do you know his address?"



"Somewhere in Wales."

"That direction would not find him, I'm afraid."

"Give a description of him on the envelope:—slightly above the middle height, sooty complexion shot with orange, two small fire-balls in his head where his eyes ought to be, address 'Wales.' Anybody will find him."

"Is that how you speak of your friend behind his back, Frank?"

"Oh! he makes fun enough of me behind *my* back, so it's a fair return. I mean him no harm—he's a good chap enough. One can't help liking him."

"Don't let him lead you, Frank."

"Lead *me*!" exclaimed Frank, as if he was the strongest minded man in the universe.

"Is it impossible?"

"I should say so."

"Glad to hear it, Frank."

"Good-night."

"Where are you going?"

"Oh! I promised Vauclose to give him a look in; I have got a pass for the stalls at the Theatre Royal West. Will you come?"

"No, thank you."

"He has given up legerdemain, and lectures on astronomy. You'll come now? you are fond of the stars, Phil."

"No, I'll stay at home."

"Stalls this time, remember!"

I shook my head.

"Good-night, then."

Frank started for the Theatre Royal West, and I for Eaton Square. I went to the house in Eaton Square, to inquire after Miss Tregancy's health; I had called regularly every evening since her illness. It was a more serious indisposition than I had imagined, and seven days passed before the news was "better." I did not go further than the hall-door each time. I had promised Mr. Greeney to see Miss Tregancy but once more if she desired it—when she was well enough to receive me as a visitor. I was content to leave my card—I had speculated in a hundred cards, engraved plate included for five shillings—make the necessary inquiry and return home. I saw nothing of Mr. Greeney or of John Tregancy, till the expiration of a fortnight, when I met the former gentleman in Eaton Square.

"Oh, Mr. Farley, have you been to our house?"

"I am going there now."

He might have seen that himself, had he not been too confused to notice anything.

"Hem—yes—have you heard from John?"

"Yes, and replied to him, Mr. Creenev."

"Oh! you did not write to Eaton Square, I hope, Sir?"

"He did not give me his country address."

"Then your letter is at home with twenty others. Oh dear—oh dear!"

"May I inquire if you have heard from Mr. Tregancy?"

"Nearly every post," replied the communicative old gentleman; "he is extremely anxious that—that you should obey—I don't mean exactly obey, my dear, Sir; that you should take the hint conveyed in his note to you."

"You are, then, aware of its contents, I presume, Mr. Creenev?"

"I can—give—a sort of guess."

"And Miss Tregancy?"

"I dare say—she can give a—sort of guess too!"

"Perhaps you will do me the favour to forward my letter to Mr. Tregancy, Sir?"

"He won't give his address—he's so aggravating. I wrote to him a week ago in Wales, and my letter has just come back through the Dead Letter Office. He's an undutiful young man. And yet, Mr. Farley, I have always allowed him his own way!"

"I fear that I am detaining you, Mr. Creenev."

"Not at all," replied Mr. Creenev; "and I, I think, my dear Sir, there is no occasion to call to-night—Miss Rhoda is a little better—in fact a great deal better."

"I think, with your permission, Sir, that I will leave my card."

"Oh, of course you have every right to do as you like," said the easy Mr. Creenev.

"Thank you, then I will call for a moment. Good-evening."

"Good-evening, Sir, good-evening. I hope we shall see you——"

"Sir?"

"I merely remarked 'Good-evening.'"

"Good-evening," I repeated again, and John Tregancy's guardian and I went our separate ways.

It was lucky that I did not take the advice of Mr. Creenev,

for Miss Tregancy's maid, who had been awaiting my arrival, came into the hall at the same moment as the porter opened the door.

"Miss Tregancy desired me to give you this note, Sir."

"Thank you. Does it require an answer?"

"I believe not, Sir. Miss Tregancy did not say so."

"Miss Tregancy is better this evening, I hear?"

"Yes, Sir, thank you."

I left my respects, and walked leisurely homewards. I did not wait till I reached Dover Road to peruse the little note, but opened it under the first street lamp, and read the three words it contained:

"Come on Sunday."

She was not anxious to put an end to our acquaintance, then, despite her brother's wishes, and the quarrel she had had with him. If, as I had gathered from stray hints, John Tregancy had left home vowing that he would not return until I was forbidden the house, Miss Tregancy had made her choice between me and her brother, and it had fallen on myself;—unless Sunday was to be my day of explanation and dismissal!

Sunday came, and I went to church in the morning with Charley Esden and his father. There were two promises to fulfil that day. I had, as it were, accepted two invitations, one to my Uncle Barchard's, and one to Eaton Square.

I should have evaded the former, and gone early in the afternoon to see Miss Tregancy, had not a dialogue between my Uncle Barchard and me taken place on the Saturday evening before I left the counting-house.

"We shall see you to-morrow."

"Thank you, Sir."

"You did not come last Sunday—getting tired of us, I suppose," he observed, gruffly.

"No, Sir, oh no."

"We dine at two."

So I went at two o'clock to the Southwark Bridge Road to dine with my Uncle Barchard. Uncle Barchard always dined at two o'clock; he had not changed his dinner hour with his fortune; he hated change of any kind. He kept to the house he had taken twenty years ago, his coat and hat were of the fashion of a remote age, he was partial to sitting in a particular chair at a particular place, he wound up the hall clock every Sunday morning at a quarter to ten,—if it

was a moment later the omission preyed upon his mind, and made him thoughtful. It was strange that in his manner and his home, he was so methodical and dull, and in his business so shrewd and deep, so quick to take advantage of changes going on in Mark Lane, of any change in fact that would put money in his pocket. My Uncle Barchard, moreover, was not a happy man. I fancied at times that there lay something heavy on his mind besides the cares of his gigantic business. Still the cares of business, and the cares of accumulating money, make many men like Mr. Barchard,—cold, phlegmatic men, sternly indifferent to anything that is calculated to touch the heart, or awaken a sympathy for things with which money has nothing to do. Mr. Barchard was a source of trouble to my cousin, too ; he was a good man and an upright man in the world's estimation, but he had forgotten One who had bestowed on him his fortune. Mr. Barchard never thought of Him, never looked at a line in His Book, or went to church to hear it read ; he could understand nothing about another world, he had enough to do with this one. This one took all his thoughts to itself, gave him always a face of care, and cast that shadow on it with which “monied-men” are marked.

Still I considered my uncle an enviable being, and thought if wealth was not happiness, at least there was no happiness without it. Perhaps there are still a few left who think so too, who knows ?

Ellen was at home, much to Mr. Barchard's secret satisfaction, for I have said that he hated change. Mrs. Holts, the housekeeper, or companion to Ellen—just such a companion as Mr. Barchard would naturally choose—was at home too, and as cheerful as usual. I had occasionally fancied that I was not a favourite of Mrs. Holts ; but as she was the same peevish, miserable woman in Ellen and Mr. Barchard's company, I had no great cause to consider myself aggrieved.

After dinner, Ellen and Mrs. Holts left Mr. Barchard to his afternoon nap in the front parlour. I was preparing to follow their example when my uncle said—

“Stay a moment, Philip.”

I resumed my seat.

My uncle drew his great leathern chair to a certain angle near the fire-place—he was very particular about two castors off the rug, and two on—took from his pocket his yellow and

red bandanna handkerchief, and spreading it across his knees, made ready to hide his head in it.

"Have you begun on those books I spoke of, Philip?"

"Yes, Sir."

"That's right. Found any mistakes yet, Philip Farley?"

"A few, Sir."

My uncle regarded me attentively.

"I have had no cause to complain of you, Philip, since I took you away from Harp Street,—an act I don't regret," said he, after a long pause.

"I am glad to hear it, Sir."

"You are sure to get on in the world if you keep steady."

"I'll try to get on, uncle."

"Uncle; you know I hate that word. Keep steady, and don't lend money, Philip; it's the worst practice in the world to lend your money, boy."

"So I have heard, Sir."

"You won't make a friend by it; you'll never get your money back again; you'll be so much out of pocket; you'll be laughed at for a soft, good-tempered fool. I never lent a penny in my life!"

"Yes, you did, Sir."

"How do you know?"

"You lent my father one hundred and twenty three pounds fourteen shillings, Sir."

"Ah! I had forgotten that. Singular, too, considering how lately it has been brought to my memory."

"Lately, Sir?"

"Yes—it's paid."

"PAID!"

"I *said* paid," replied my uncle.

"But when—where—by whom?"

"Six months ago your step-mother sent thirty pounds off the debt from Australia. She's what I call an honest woman."

"And the rest. Has she——"

"And the rest was paid some weeks ago by Miss Tregancy."

"By her!" I exclaimed. "Miss Tregancy offer to pay *my* debt, Mr. Barchard! I hope you did not take the money."

"Oh! yes, I did. I never turn away cash."

My cheeks were burning, and I sat bewildered. My father's debt paid by Rhoda Tregancy—by her of all the world!

"That is why I asked once if Miss Tregancy was mad," said he; "it was a very mad trick, at all events."

"Will you be kind enough to give me further information?" said I; "all this is a mystery at present."

"Miss Tregancy came one evening, asked the amount, or if I should object to receive it—and paid it."

"I wish that you had told her it was the son's place to pay the father's debts, Mr. Barchard."

"She was of a rational age; she said that you were a friend of hers."

I sat biting my finger-nails.

"Does Ellen know this, Sir?"

"No! I suppose," he added, "Miss Tregancy is worth money?"

"I believe so, Sir."

"Are you engaged to her?" he asked, abruptly.

"No, Sir," I answered, blushing.

"Young men in general are very foolish, very heedless, but you, Philip, are more wise and considerate. How old is Miss Tregancy?"

"Twenty-nine or thirty, Sir."

"Not too old for you by any means. Philip," with a sparkle in his eye, "you might become a rich man before you are one and twenty years of age—it is worth thinking of, worth studying!"

"It is worth thinking of," I repeated, slowly.

I did not tell him that I had thought of it before. The subject was a delicate one, and I cared not to discuss it.

"Her brother," said my uncle, putting the bandanna over his head and face, "he's a strange fellow too. He'll spend all *his* money, and go to the dogs."

"Do you think so, Sir?"

"I can see it in him. A fool, Philip, a fool!" observed my uncle; "I am glad Ellen had nothing to do with him."

Uncle Barchard was full of surprising communications that afternoon.

"Has Mr. Tregancy ever proposed to my cousin, Sir?" said I, with a start.

"Some time ago," answered the voice behind the handkerchief.

My friends were as secret as myself then, after all. Here had my cousin Ellen received an offer from John Tregancy, and I had never heard a word concerning it. And John Tregancy had been rejected too, and Ellen did not love him!

"He would have broken Ellen's heart in six months."

"He was scarce suitable for Ellen, Sir."

"A spendthrift, no ! And, Philip, take my advice, and marry for money if you can."

"I may never have the chance, Sir," I replied, with a forced laugh.

"Now, *do* think seriously of it, Philip."

"Well ! I will, Sir," said I, magnanimously.

"Marrying for love is all nonsense—wretched nonsense," said the muffled voice ; "look at Mrs. Holts."

"Did she marry for love, Sir ?"

"She eloped with her husband when she was sixteen years old. Quite a love-match people said !"

"And her husband, Sir ?"

"Did his best to break her heart. Mrs. Holts was a distant relation of Ellen's mother."

"Indeed, Sir."

"Therefore I obtained Holts a place in the mills—Hodkins and Crawley's mills at that time. He robbed them, ran away, and left Mrs. Holts for the streets to take care of. Devil take him !"

"Perhaps he did, Sir !"

"Perhaps he did. That son is a soft-headed idle drone, too. I caught him reading a prayer-book in business hours, the donkey !"

"Indeed, Sir."

"I told him that if he did it again I should walk him out of the office by the ear. He has not—done—it—since."

Mr. Barchard's head beginning to make little dives to the right and left, I sat and waited silently till a peculiar snorting sound issued from behind the handkerchief.

Rising softly from my chair, I crept on tiptoe to the door, and went up stairs to my cousin and Mrs. Holts.

I found the ladies in the drawing-room ; Mrs. Holts dozing over a family Bible, Ellen sitting at the window, and looking thoughtful.

My cousin held up one finger by way of caution, as I entered the room.

"Mrs. Holts has fallen into my father's ways," she said, in a low voice ; "don't disturb her."

"Not for the world," I responded, fervently.

"I am afraid, cousin, that you do not like Mrs. Holts."

"I do not see anything to particularly admire," was my answer, with a sidelong glance at the lady in question ; "but I should be sorry to own that I disliked her."

"There are many worse than Mrs. Holts in the world, Philip."

"I have not a doubt of it."

"She is not a cheerful companion for me, perhaps," said Ellen, with a sigh; "but still she is a good-hearted, honest, feeling lady, with an intense admiration for a fellow-clerk of yours."

"Mr. Holts?"

"Yes. Is he very good, and clever, and pious?"

"He's a very mild young man, I believe."

"A favourite in the office?"

"A favourite subject for practical jokes, that is all."

"There is another fellow-clerk of yours I wish to ask a word concerning," said Ellen, "but you must not think me a spy for Annie Tackeridge. I am prompted by my own wicked curiosity, Philip."

"Say on, fair cousin."

"Do you think young Mr. Esden is still attached to Annie Tackeridge?"

"He will not own it, Ellen, at all events," I replied; "and now, do *you* think Annie Tackeridge ever has a kind thought for Frank Esden?"

"Your reply will serve for mine."

"She will not own it?"

"Annie is a firm young lady, too firm for her own happiness," answered Ellen Barchard.

"Why was she not firm enough to keep to her first love—to give him that hope which would have saved him from much folly—perhaps much repentance?"

"Annie is very high-spirited, very resolute sometimes when weakness would be more of a virtue. From the little I have learned, I believe Frank Esden's manner that day at Walmer was too impetuous, and too fierce for Annie. He talked to her as if he had a right to claim her for his own, when not a word of affection had passed on either side. Annie's pride was roused too, and—"

"And so ended the love-dream of Frank Esden," concluded I; "many a love-dream before and since has died out as suddenly, I have no doubt."

"That does not sound like an observation of my matter-of-fact cousin's," said Ellen; "has any love-dream of Philip Farley's made him more poetical?"

"Oh! no."

"Philip Farley's face has grown pale and thin, and there are



some very deep lines across his forehead—come, will you not confess? I will not tell again. You do not know how clever I am at keeping a secret.”

“Yes, I do,” was my reply; “for there was a secret concerning John Tregancy which you have never told me.”

She blushed, but said quickly—

“I left it for John Tregancy to communicate himself.”

“John Tregancy seldom favours me with his communications. I know nothing of a certain proposal and rejection—it was rejection, Ellen?—”

“Certainly; what else had Mr. Tregancy to expect?”

“Of a certain proposal and rejection,” I continued, “till this afternoon, when my uncle let the secret escape him.”

“It was not intended for a secret, Philip,” said Ellen; “but as Mr. Tregancy was your friend—”

“No friend of mine.”

“No friend!”

“That is,” said I, correcting myself, lest more embarrassing questions should arise, “hardly a friend—an acquaintance, nothing more.”

“You go very often to see that acquaintance,” said Ellen, with a shake of her glossy black curls; “what suspicions I should have, if Miss Tregancy was a little younger.”

I felt my cheeks flushing, but I answered lightly—

“It is lucky that I have no young-lady acquaintance then, or you would tease me out of my life about her.”

“I should be a grand inquisitor, and expect you, for the sake of old times, to make confession once a week.”

“Secrets are best kept in one’s own heart, Ellen; they are only safe there.”

“True.”

I looked up, and she said in a lighter tone,

“Then you would not tell me your secrets, Philip?”

“Did you tell me that the flirtation between you and Tregancy had made this rapid progress?”

“There was no flirtation between us, Philip,” she replied, “or I should have had much wherewith to reproach myself.”

“Yet, to my surprise, I hear that he proposed.”

“To my surprise he proposed, too,” said Ellen. “Oh! dear, what could such a stern-looking young man see in poor little me!”

“Do you know, Ellen, I used to fancy that there was a corner of your heart reserved for John Tregancy.”

"You did, Philip!" she cried, with an earnestness that made Mrs. Holts open her eyes for half a minute.

"Yes."

"What made you fancy that?"

"You have appeared always interested in him, Ellen. Interested in those incidents in which he took a share at school, interested in—"

"That will do, Philip, that will do," said Ellen; "I am sorry my cousin should have arrived at this hasty conclusion; let us change the subject."

"What's the time, I wonder?" said the sharp voice of Mrs. Holts.

"It must be nearly five," replied Ellen, "I think I heard the clock on the stairs strike a few moments since."

"How time has slipped away!" said Mrs. Holts, closing the Bible, "what a number of refreshing chapters I have read, to be sure. Heigho!"

Mrs. Holts placed her Bible on a side-table, and rose.

"It's nearly time for tea," said she, yawning. "I suppose, Ellen, that you are going to church to-night."

"Of course I am. Here is an old friend come on purpose to escort me there."

"Glad to hear that you are fond of church, Mr. Farley. A good sign," remarked Mrs. Holts.

"Yes Ma'am," said I, "but—but I am very sorry to say, Ellen, that I have an engagement for this evening."

"Have you?" said she, quietly.

"I was forced, as it were, to accept an—an invitation."

"My dear cousin, don't offer me your excuses," interrupted she, "I have no right to hear them. Still I am sorry."

"Sorry for what, Ellen?"

"I may offend you."

"Oh! no. I am not quick to take offence."

"I am sorry to see how dull and tedious my father and I have become in your estimation, Philip," said she, "how ready you are to accept any invitations of a Sunday, that will take you away from us."

"You are unjust, Ellen."

"We are old-fashioned people in contrast to those grand new friends of yours in Eaton Square. You are going to Eaton Square, I know."

"Yes,—I have no reason to disguise that fact."

"You will find more pleasure in the accomplished Miss

Tregancy's society than in taking me to church. Well ! that is natural enough."

"No, no, Ellen ! " I cried, " the greatest pleasure of my life is—"

I stopped, I pressed my hand upon my heart ;—was it betraying me ?

" But why do you try hard for an excuse, Philip, when no excuse is necessary ? I have not asked for one, and I do not think Mr. Barchard will."

I glanced at Ellen ; for the first time it struck me that she was looking ill.

Mr. Barchard came into the room at the same moment as the servant-maid entered with the tea-things, and we, at the early and unfashionable hour of five o'clock in the afternoon,—when grander people farther west were thinking of their dinners,—sat down to the third meal of the day.

It was the dulllest tea of which I had ever partaken at Uncle Barchard's house ; everyone was silent and moody. Ellen was certainly vexed that afternoon, and I, for an unaccountable reason, was vexed also—vexed that I was going, and that Miss Tregancy's note had not said, " Come on Monday ! " It was not a common event for Ellen to be silent or downcast, and Mr. Barchard missed something that afternoon ; he was not in the habit of talking himself, or paying very great attention to any one more conversational than he ; but he soon detected something singular at his tea-table, and therefore took a survey of things in general with his great brown eyes.

" What's the matter, Mrs. Holts ? "

" Nothing, Sir ; good gracious, Sir, you don't think anything is the matter anywhere, I hope ! "

" Is anything the matter, Ellen ? "

" No, papa."

" Philip, you are dull to-day."

" I have a headache, Sir."

" Ah ! bad things, headaches. Take a walk to-night, on the bridge."

" I am going to Eaton Square, Sir."

" Going to see Mr. Tregancy, Philip ? "

" Miss Tregancy is unwell, Sir. I am going to inquire after her health,—it is but friendly," said I, half aside to Ellen.

" It is kind of you," she answered.

Nothing more was said during tea ; the meal was finished in silence, the tea-things were carried down stairs, and I, with a

sense of uncomfortableness for which I could not account, rose to take my leave.

What made my heart beat, and my brain burn that day as I had never known it in all my life before? was it because the great step of that life might be taken at a later hour when I was by the side of John Tregancy's sister, or was it that a faint light glimmered for the first time midst the darkness I had raised around myself?

I felt unhappy, too—unsettled. I looked at Ellen, and thought of Miss Tregancy, and involuntarily the contrast between them—one so fair, young, gentle, and so good, the other so dark, so many years my senior, so wild and uncontrollable, rose up before me.

Why did my hand tremble as it held Ellen's in its clasp for one fleeting moment before I went away?

"Philip," she said, earnestly, "do not make Tregancy your friend. I am afraid of him."

"He has never been a friend of mine."

"And yet you go to see him. Well! good-evening, Philip. A pleasant evening. A pleasant evening," her bright smile broke forth again, "mind you do not fall in love with Miss Tregancy, Sir. I have my doubts of you."

"Shall I stop?"

"What, and break your engagement?" said Ellen as she withdrew her hand; "that would be unlike a gentleman. Good-evening."

"Good-bye."

I did not say "good-evening," as I went away, but "good-bye," as though I were going on a long journey, and it were doubtful if I ever should come back. Did I ever return again with the same thoughts, the same heart, as on that Sunday for ever ineffaceable in the record left me here?

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE CONFESSION.

I FORGOT everything but my dream of conquest when the servant was ushering me up stairs to Miss Tregancy. I stifled everything that could be to me a warning or reproach, and

went blindly on my way full of the one purpose that my ambitious heart had formed, from the hour I was chosen Miss Tregancy's confidant.

I had had a host of thoughts, each warring on the other, five minutes since—thoughts of what might happen if I turned back, gave up the chase, let the shrine of Mammon have one worshipper the less—thoughts antagonistic to the hopes that might raise me to a high position in the world, to one behind the lighted blinds of that house before which I stood reflecting, the one who was waiting for my coming, and who might be content to share her life with me. Thoughts of being rich, of becoming independent—thoughts of remaining poor and honourable, and staying till the true genius of my life came into the light to gladden me—thoughts full of doubt lest I should be mistaken, and all be idle speculation.

"I WILL!" Temptation dragged me with too powerful a hand; there was a voice too weak, too distant to call me back unto my better self—a voice like Ellen's far away! I entered, and meeting Miss Tregancy face to face in the brilliantly-lighted drawing-room, forgot everything but my pursuit.

I must love her—I did love her—who was there else to love, and what folly was to hold me back from happiness and riches?

"Mr. Farley, I had nearly given up all hope of seeing you to-night."

She was very pale, but when her hand lay in mine, I saw the flush spread over her face, and make her for the moment almost handsome. Oh! yes, I loved her; my heart was beating wildly, my voice was husky as I answered—

"I am sure Miss Tregancy does not think that I would disobey her least request."

"I am not quite sure of that."

"I have great pleasure in congratulating you on your recovery to health."

"A poor recovery, Mr. Farley. Pray be seated."

I sat facing her; it was singular that when either of us spoke, the eyes were fixed upon the carpet.

"I miss Mr. Creeney to-night," I observed.

"He will be back soon. He has gone to church."

"Have you heard from John?"

"Not a line. If I never hear from him again," she said with flashing eyes, "I shall not break my heart!"

I did not reply to that little outburst, and after a short silence she said—

"The tie which bound together brother and sister was a weak one at the best."

"Time may yet strengthen it, Miss Rhoda."

"It is broken."

"I hope not."

"We are sundered for ever. The false smiles we may wear, or the expressions of interest in each other we may hereafter feign, will not unite us. The remembrance of our last quarrel will never cease to rankle."

"Mutual faults may be overlooked—words spoken in the heat of the moment should not be stored up as grievous wrongs."

"The Tregancys are unforgiving."

"I regret to hear that my unworthy self was the cause of the last quarrel with your brother, Miss Tregancy."

She looked more intently at the carpet, and the burning blushes chased each other over her face as she replied :

"No matter the subject—that is the least consideration when my brother's evil hour arrives. He who makes up his mind to torture another's feelings, need not go far for an excuse."

I had begun some commonplace expression of consolation, to which she paid no heed—she was too absorbed in her own bitter thoughts. A sudden and passionate outburst of weeping cut short my speech, and made me change my tone. Such abandonment to grief, such wildness in her sorrow, I had never seen before.

"My dear Miss Tregancy, I am sure that you are doing wrong, nay, more, I am sure that you are undoing all the good that a fortnight's rest and calmness have produced. It will be better for me to retire, to call some future day when you are stronger."

"No, no, you must not go yet. Oh, I am so helpless, miserable and lonely !"

"This purposeless grief will make you ill."

"No, it will relieve me. Mr. Farley, I sent for you to-night, to say that—"

She had to pause, her emotion was so violent. Presently, she continued :

"—To say that you must come no more. It is my wish, as well as John Tregancy's, though you have been my friend, let me say my younger brother."

"No, *don't say that*," I cried impetuously.

"Mr. Farley !"

The moment's impulse was not to be resisted—that moment's impulse was like a strong man's love, in which every prudent thought is borne away as by a mighty flood.

"Miss Tregancy, Rhoda—do not talk of want of friends or want of sympathy, and yet at the bidding of my enemies dismiss your truest friend of all—dismiss him who seeks you for his wife, and offers you—young as he is—the devotion of a life."

I was at her feet—one trembling hand lay unresisting in my own, the other was pressed before her eyes. I knew that she was crying passionately, that those choking sobs, and that tumultuous heaving of her bosom, were engendered by my vows of passion—true, ardent vows in that excited moment, Heaven bear me witness!

"Oh! tell me this some other time," she murmured; "I am very weak and ill."

"All is spoken, Rhoda, there is no more to tell; I have confessed the story of my passion—of my love."

"Rise—rise!"

"Not till you have given me an answer, Rhoda, that will make me happy, or send me away never to return. You say that you are helpless—miserable—lonely—will you turn from one who will do his best to clear the shadows from that path, along which he hopes to journey with you for ever?"

"You are young—you are almost a boy—what will they say—what will they say of me?"

"What will who say?"

"My brother, Mr. Creaney, and the invidious world."

"Is that world then to rule our actions, and to judge them?"

Her hand still rested in my own—she was still weeping, but the violent emotion which had followed my confession was gradually subsiding.

"I have discovered, Rhoda, your sequel to that story I told you months ago, concerning my father and his debts. You have rendered me your debtor by that act, so generous, yet so humiliating—you have covered me with shame, unless you give this hand to me—a pledge that the boy has won your heart."

"Is it to be believed," she murmured, "that the woman of nine-and-twenty has won upon the first ardent affections of youth—a woman such as I am—splenetic, impatient, jealous and ill-favoured?—without one charm to win the fancy or

attract the romance that lies deep in every young nature like your own."

"I see you troubled—ever unhappy in this home—you have been my friend—oh! be my true friend by a dearer, holier name."

"I am so old—so old—so old—so old!" she repeated, snatching her hand away from me, and seeking to hide the agitation which her face betrayed.

"Rhoda, will you answer me?"

Still silent—the tears flowing rapidly again—both hands before her face.

"Rhoda, will you answer me?" I said a second time.

"Yes."

The hands dropped from her face, seized mine, and held them firmly in their clasp. The great black eyes swimming with tears, were fixed on me at last, seeking to look into my soul and read my secret there.

"Sit here—by me—and I will give my answer."

She still retained my hands, when I had taken my place by her side—still regarding me with searching eyes. She was handsome then with that look upon her face, and her warm hands that clasped my own seemed infusing through my veins the force and love of her ardent nature.

"Philip, you offer to take for a wife one who will be an old woman when you are in the prime of life."

"Will nine years make that difference?"

"Nine years, a feverish, excited temper, and a weak constitution will."

"What will excite you when you are my wife?"

"Ah! what may the future have in store? but let me continue."

Her breath, quick and short as though she had been running, stifled her voice to a low whisper; but my greedy ears drank in every word.

"You offer to take for a wife," she resumed again, "one whose temper has been uncontrollable from a child, whose faults are numberless, and whose jealousy preys even on herself. Do you not shrink from such a bride as that?"

"No," replied I, pressing her hands in mine.

"You offer to take for a wife one whose attraction to older and more worldly men would be her money—"

I cowered for a moment beneath her glance, as if a hot iron were scorching me; but her excitement had blinded her, and



she could not see the guilty blush upon my face. She could not believe that I, so young, so impetuous and earnest, sought her for her gold. I had forgotten it myself, till her words startled the accusing spirit in my breast.

"—One who fears that she is incapable of making home or husband happy, whose passions are too strong, and whose resolution to combat them is too weak. Are you not tempted now, Philip, to break away and say—'it is better thus to part—let me seek a younger, fairer woman?' "

"No."

"Then—then take me for your wife, Philip—I wish that I was younger and prettier, for your sake—I wish I was more worthy of you!"

She hid her head upon my breast and sobbed again in the fullness of her heart. I pressed her in my arms, and inwardly vowed to deserve the confidence and love which I had won that night.

When the last shower of tears had dispersed, the storm of many conflicting emotions had subsided, and we sat two lovers, side by side, one entranced, the other truly happy; we talked of the future which lay beyond—of the day when we should stand together before a sacred altar, and vow to love and honour for a life-time.

"Is it unmaidenly for me to say, Philip, let it be soon and secret? Let it be soon, lest Fate should try to thwart the happiness of Rhoda Tregancy, who, God knows, has basked in little sunshine yet! lest John, so stern and reckless, should strike some blow at the root of our hopes, and kill it ere the tree has put forth a single blossom."

"Need I say the sooner, dear, the better?"

"Ah! you flatter me, of course, but I am older than you, and age is not to be deceived," replied she, with a smile; "and now let it be a secret—let no one save Mr. Greeney—I can trust him, I think—know of our engagement until it is too late for you or me to repent the great step we have taken."

"Will you repent, Rhoda?"

"Never."

"And if John Tregancy return?"

"He will not return till I have given you up—or we are married, unless" with a shudder, "he breaks the most fearful oath that ever tongue uttered to chill the heart of listener."

"You may trust me to be secret."

"We do not want a gay wedding, Philip—a host of bridesmaids—a stream of carriages before St. George's—a crowd of

false acquaintances to sneer at the ill-assorted match, and whisper satirical remarks in the very house of God. We shall be happy enough and grand enough, with Mr. Creeney to give the bride away."

"Mr. Creeney will not betray our confidence?"

"Mr. Creeney was my guardian—my father's friend. He is somewhat weak-minded, but if there is a choice to make between my brother and myself he will stand by me, I am sure; and when he hears that my happiness in life is bound up with your own, Philip, he will do his best to promote the welfare of us both."

Mr. Creeney came in shortly afterwards, and found us side by side, my arm twined round the waist of my betrothed, her face upturned, her sparkling eyes looking into mine.

"God bless my soul and body!" cried Mr. Creeney, jumping in the air and dropping his prayer-book, "why—whoever—Rhoda, Mr. Farley—what is all this—what *does* it all mean?"

Rhoda rose, and led me by the hand to Mr. Creeney.

"You must not be offended, dear friend, if I have made my choice in life for once and ever, for better or for worse. I have made it where my heart is—where all my love is, and I am old enough to choose."

"Oh, lor! I never was so much astonished—ring for a glass of water, Rhoda, dear—bless us and save us—oh, dear!"

"Mr. Creeney," said Rhoda, "this is my affianced husband; will you shake hands with him?"

"My dear girl, with much pleasure."

"And will you offer me—for so many years an undutiful ward, and since I have been my own mistress, for so many years a wilful woman—your congratulations?"

Mr. Creeney began to cry, to shake us both by the hands, to wish us every happiness.

In the mimic life which players on the stage show the world before it, the green curtain invariably falls on a scene akin to this. Corydon and Chloris, hand-in-hand, and grey hairs blessing them. Thus ends the story, and the stage is cleared away for the ballet or the farce.

Let the curtain fall, too, on this night—though the story ends not with the blessing uttered over hands united. Enough has been said—confessed. Looking back upon that era of my life—that rock, over which the stormy waves have long since washed, I bow my head upon my folded arms, and hide a face of shame.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## MARRIED.

OUR marriage day was fixed for an early day in February—that day came in with wind and snow and sleet, and all that makes days look like desolation. I had obtained a holiday from Uncle Barchard, and Frank and his brother had started from Dover Road without me, little dreaming of my project, or of the great change, which was so near at hand, for me. Puzzled with the reason for my leave of absence, they had gone away half offended at my refusal to throw a light upon the mystery. I had resolved however to break the news to Mr. Esden and his wife, the moment before my departure; it was necessary to make the communication, there being my old room to resign and my accounts to settle.

Rhoda Tregancy had given her consent with reluctance to this arrangement; she was jealous of her secret—she was fearful lest the cup should be dashed from her lips at the last moment, and some strange accident should separate us yet.

It was nine o'clock when Kitty knocked gently at the door of that little back room wherein I was dressing for my bride.

"If you please, Mr. Farley, missus wishes to know if that 'ere carriage outside has been sent for you, Sir—the man won't go away."

"Yes, yes—it is quite right," I answered; "where is Mr. Esden, Kitty?"

"He's in the second pair back—the library, I mean, Sir."

"Will you tell him and Mrs. Esden, Kitty, that I desire a few minutes' conversation with them. I shall be down stairs in a minute."

"Yes, Sir."

Kitty, impressed by the mystery, delivered my message like a ghostly warning, and upon my descending to the parlour, I found Mr. and Mrs. Esden anxiously awaiting me. They looked with wonder at my gay appearance—the truth did not flash upon them in an instant—it was too improbable.

"Well, Mrs. Esden—Mr. Esden," said I, "I am about to take a very long holiday,—I don't know when we shall see each other again."

"This is very astonishing!" said Mr. Esden, drawing a long breath.

"For many reasons I have been forced to keep the secret from those with whom I have spent many happy days. I am going to be married."

"Oh! dear—oh! dear, whoever would have thought it!" said Mrs. Esden, beginning to cry as bitterly as if I was going to be hanged, "to be married—oh! how young you are. Are you sure, my dear boy, that you have considered this sufficiently?"

"Are Frank and Charley still in ignorance, Philip?" asked Mr. Esden.

"I have left you to relate the story, my dear Mr. Esden," I replied; "will you remember me to Frank and Charley—give them my best wishes—tell them that I shall often think of the house in Dover Road and the good friends that I have made in it."

"We are sorry to lose you, Philip," said Mr. Esden; "it's rather a shock—I wish the news had not come so suddenly as this."

"Oh! dear me," sobbed Mrs. Esden, "it is like losing my youngest son."

"I have taken the liberty of making a small account out, Mrs. Esden," said I; "you will find it on the dressing-table of my room. You will excuse me leaving without one word of warning, I am sure."

"Don't talk like a lodger," said Mr. Esden, peevishly.

"And the lady, Philip, my dear boy—the lady—who is she?" asked Mrs. Esden; "your cousin, Miss Barchard?"

"No," I answered, with a strange sinking at the heart.

"Miss Tregancy?" guessed Mr. Esden.

"Yes."

"I have heard Frank speak of her—but—"

He stopped and hesitated.

"But she is a few years my senior," said I, with a laugh; "well, that is a little change from the general order of marriages. I shall not be less happy."

"I have a first copy of witty old Fletcher's 'Maid of the Mill' up stairs,—there is a comforting line therein. Read the 'Maid of the Mill,' Philip."

"Oh! don't bring in those tiresome books now, my dear," said Mrs. Esden.

"It says: 'Equality is no rule in Love's grammar.' Gad! that's true enough."

"What difference can a few years make if the hearts are in the right place?" remarked Mrs. Esden; "why I am two years your senior, Frank, my dear!"

"Ay—and few can look back, Mrs. Esden, on as smooth a road in life, albeit a certain fortune fell to the bottom of a precipice as we journeyed on. I hope your married life will be as happy, Philip."

"I hope so."

"As for difference in age, pooh, pooh! Certainly you are young, but then there's a firmness in your ways that makes you older than my Boys. There is no one would take you for twenty years of age, Philip, with that grave face, that flourishing crop of whiskers, and that six feet of stature. But we are detaining you."

"I am full early."

"Don't be late on your wedding-day," said he, "it is a bad sign and unworthy of a lord of the creation. And now, my dear Boy," he grasped me firmly by the hand, "my best wishes for your lasting health, happiness, and prosperity. You do not know how sorry I am to lose you."

I saw the tears in his eyes, and I felt my own lips quivering.

Mrs. Esden burst forth with her congratulations, and ended by weeping on my shoulder, and seriously disarranging my wedding neck-tie in the fervency of her embrace.

I was in the passage at last, and Kitty the servant-maid was holding the door open for me. She knew all about it too; I could see it on her expressive countenance. In the excitement of the moment I put a sovereign in her hand for a new dress—more, I did not regret the act when I was cooling down in the carriage.

I started. Mr. and Mrs. Esden joined Kitty on the doorstep; Mr. Esden waved his one hand to me in farewell, Mrs. Esden flung an old shoe after the carriage—ancient, mysterious, respectable custom 'of ye Englishe'—as it bore me away never to return a single man.

I was at the church five minutes before Miss Tregancy. Having the sacred edifice almost to myself, I paced up and down the silent aisles and thought of the days that were in store for me. There was a pew-opener, and a ghastly young man, who might have been the clerk or sexton, wandering in and out the vestry, and a gloriously bedizened beadle was sitting close to the entrance doors, ready to dash into the snow and sleet outside at the sound of carriage-wheels advancing.

The pew-opener came towards me.

"Will you walk into the vestry, Sir?"

"No, thank you."

"There's a fire there, Sir."

I declined the temptation and continued my solitary walk. The dreary morning had depressed my spirits, and the lonely church, with its rows of empty pews, was not calculated to enliven them. There were no friends at my side, no laughing groom's man with jokes appropriate to the occasion, not a single note from the belfry to tell of Philip Farley's wedding to the world.

A carriage came rattling to the church steps; the beadle disappeared, the sexton rushed to the red-baize doors and threw them open, admitting a rush of cold air into the interior which made me shiver. Another moment, and Rhoda Tregancy, on Mr. Creeney's arm, was entering the church. She looked pale and ill, but her face lighted up as I advanced.

"Do you not repent, Philip?" she whispered, with a bright smile.

"It is I should ask that question of my Rhoda."

"No need to ask it, then. My heart is full of hope, of happiness."

"And mine."

"I have not come here a gay bride, Philip, I have left the white lace dress and sweeping veil at home. This silver-grey, and this bonnet, with its spray of orange blossom—I have not forgotten the orange blossom, dear—suits me better, and is less pretentious."

"Will you step into the vestry, please?" said the pew-opener.

Into the vestry, where a gas stove was trying to look cheerful under difficulties—where the clergyman, without his surplice, waited with his attendant clerk. An examination of the license, and an entering of names and ages in the church books.

"Philip Farley, aged twenty; profession, clerk; father's trade or calling—BAKER!"

"Rhoda Tregancy, aged 29; father—gentleman!"

The minister entered the full particulars in his book with an unmoved countenance, he was accustomed to strange couples, and the pair before him did not attract a great degree of interest; trade married quality occasionally, youth wedded age, riches a scanty purse, robust health the hectic and consumptive—"Equality is no rule in Love's grammar!"

Before the altar where the words went forth, the vows were

spoken, the hands clasped—from the altar to the vestry again man and wife. From the vestry, along the middle aisle, dispensing fees to pew-opener and beadle, into the carriage round which a few idlers had collected in the snow—rattling to Eaton Square with Rhoda by my side and Mr. Creeney following in the next carriage.

“What a dull day it is,” said Rhoda, “is it ominous?”

“I have no faith in omens, Rhoda.”

“Is there not a saying, ‘Happy the bride that the sun shines on?’—I wish there had been sunshine on my path to church!”

“If there is sunshine in the heart, what matters?”

“Ah! what matters then, indeed—HUSBAND!”



## CHAPTER IX.

### ONE AND TWENTY.

THE wedding breakfast might have passed for a funeral feast, it was so dull and solemn. The three who sat down to a banquet that might have feasted fifty, had on their minds the great change that had taken place that morning, and were not merry over it.

The change was too new, had occurred under too strange circumstances, to make Rhoda Tregancy outwardly cheerful,—the first few hours after the wedding-ring is on the finger are not cheerful ones to the most light-hearted fairy that ever fluttered from home to the arms of the stranger;—and therefore she sat a silent and meditative bride.

Mr. Creeney was trying his hardest to make an exhibition of himself and sink bride and bridegroom in a sea of despondency, by dwelling on the past, when Rhoda and John were children, when their father and mother were living, and crying over each reminiscence. I did my best to struggle against the adverse tide that had set in, but the effort was a weak one, and the effect was not apparent. I was glad when the wedding-breakfast was over, when Mr. Creeney’s maudlin speech, wishing us every joy on earth, was at an end, when I had responded—what dreary speech-making it was, with Mr. Creeney crying bitterly, and the sleet driving against the window-glass!—when Rhoda Tregancy had left the room to change her wedding-

gown, when the time was near for man and wife to start upon their journey, and begin the honeymoon in earnest. Taking advantage of the few spare moments that followed Rhoda's withdrawal from the room, I sat down to write a hurried note to Uncle Barchard, telling him of my change in life, resigning my situation as his clerk, giving my love to his daughter Ellen, —my wife's love, too—and concluding with thanks for all his past kindness and protection. Mr. Creeney, retaining his seat at the table, fidgeted with the stem of the wine-glass in which my health had been drunk, watched the rapid progress of my pen over the paper, blew his nose, and wiped his eyes frequently with his great white cambric handkerchief.

"You'll write and let me know how you are getting on, Mr. Farley," he whimpered.

"Certainly, Sir."

"I was always fond of Rhoda ; I never thought that I should have seen her married, or that her marriage-day would be like this one ;—I mean, of course, as dull as this one."

"It is the best plan, doubtless, to summon every friend to the wedding festival," said I, folding my letter ; "friends bring smiles and jesting with them, and soften the parting of the bride with those nearer and dearer to her."

"Exactly, and—OH !"

Mr. Creeney paused. I looked up from my note. The nervous old gentleman, tightly clutching his wine glass, was glaring towards the door, at which stood John Tregancy !

I had seen him in many dark moods in my life, but I had never seen him as he was looking then. His dress was as careless and disordered as if it had been unchanged since the preceding night, his eyes were full of fire and passion, his features seemed swollen, and his long black hair hung in a wild disorder about his head and face.

"What does all this mean ?" he asked between his set teeth, as he slowly advanced, and stared from Mr. Creeney to myself.

"Ah ! John," said Mr. Creeney, faintly, "I am glad you have come home again."

"I ask what this means, and you stammer out a welcome home," said Tregancy ; "are you too cowardly to tell me, Mr. Creeney ; too much taken by surprise to confess the scheming that has gone on behind my back ?"

I placed the letter in my pocket, and looked at Mr. Creeney. Mr. Creeney, who had relied on my entering into a full explanation, glanced nervously in my direction.



"Will neither of you speak?" cried Tregancy, in louder tones; "are you both dumb?"

He did not wait for a reply, but came and stood before me, with both hands clenched, as though he thought of striking me. I rose from my chair, and stood upon my guard.

"Mr. Farley," said he, "you received my letter."

"I did, Sir."

"I told you not to come—I warned you!"

"It was not my duty to obey your warning, Sir," I answered haughtily, "it was not my place to submit to your dictation."

"It was!" he cried.

"I think not."

"For the third time, I ask for a meaning of this scene?"

"My dear John," began Mr. Creeney.

"Sir," turning to Mr. Creeney, "do not interrupt me. I have explanations to ask of you the tool, as well as of this man the knave who has played his cards so admirably."

"Your passion carries you away—what explanations can I give a madman?"

"Will you tell me?" he hissed.

I saw his fingers unclench; I knew that they were itching to be at my throat, and I still stood on my guard, doubtful of his ungovernable temper.

"I will tell you, John Tregancy, if you cannot guess."

"Have I hurried to this house, travelled night and day, and broken my oath, to *guess* your riddles? Speak out, Sir, like a man!"

"You ask what this," pointing to the breakfast-table, "means?"

"Yes."

"It means that Rhoda Tregancy became my wife this morning."

"May God make every after-hour of her life a curse!"

"Oh! John, John—oh! don't for mercy's sake!" entreated Mr. Creeney.

"Silence, you pander!" shouted Tregancy, "do you think your childish whinings will affect me, or will lead me to sit down calmly and see myself beguiled? I say, may every—"

"I will not hear this," I cried, "you speak not only of your sister, Sir, but of my wife. The time has gone by when you could stretch her on a sick-bed by your ravings, and go away triumphant at the misery you had caused. I will not hear another word against her."

"*You* will not !"

"No."

"Have you the power to stop the utterance of an honest indignation at hearing a sister has been so mad and wilful as to throw away her fortune on a boy of twenty ? What can Philip Farley do to John Tregancy ?"

"He will forget he is Mrs. Farley's brother, and knock him down," said I, coolly.

If ever the enemy of mankind looked out of human eyes, he shone in John Tregancy's at that moment.

"Be quiet, be quiet for Heaven's sake," implored Mr. Creenev, as he sprang between me and Tregancy, "this is no time for brawling, for—oh ! dear, dear, think of Rhoda both of you. Oh ! what shall I do ?"

"Rhoda is the best defender of her actions," said the voice of my wife behind me, "being acquainted with the weapons with which John Tregancy fights."

"Rhoda, I beg, for my sake and your own, that you will be calm beneath his ungenerous attacks !" I cried, "I have a right to urge you."

She linked her hands on my arm saying—

"Philip, you need not fear me. I am in no mood to lose my self-command, and to show my husband, on his wedding-day, a passion equal to that man's."

"Oh ! you have great power of endurance," said Tregancy, "Mr. Creenev and I have been admiring witnesses of it in our time."

"John, do you remember how we parted ?"

"Well, Madam !"

"We parted, wishing that it might be our last meeting this side of the grave ; and now we meet again with wishes as unnatural and cruel."

"Have our meetings been so rife with happiness as to desire more of them ? If you or I had died when we were children, Madam, the survivor would have cause to bless God for the mercy."

Rhoda's colour changed ; but I pressed her hands to my side, and she said in a low tone—

"I am calm, Philip, I will not lose my temper."

"Believe her not, Sir," said Tregancy, to me ; "she has no power to keep that promise."

"I have a powerful friend, now," she replied, "and he will give me help, encourage me by his patience and his love."

"His love of your money!"

"John," continued his sister, "I have had to choose between you and him—between the false heart and the true one—and I have chosen for the best."

Tregancy had assumed the same forced air of calmness; the restraint which Rhoda exercised was setting him a lesson. Still, to all she said he answered with an intensity of bitterness, of which his words written here convey no just conception. He had fixed his eyes on Rhoda from the moment of her entrance, and had not once withdrawn them.

"Pray, go on—the wedding-ring has made you quite a heroine."

"If you had studied me once in your whole life—once when you were a boy, and the stains on your heart were not so black and deep, I would have paused before this irrevocable step was taken, and asked you what to do. But you have ever hated me, John; year after year has witnessed but the ripening of your evil passions, and your struggles to crush a sister's love and thwart her happiness; has shown how weak and criminal was every step you took, and assured me that there was no hope of one true word by which I might be guided."

"Well," with a shrug of the shoulders, "there is your new counsellor to guide you—you who were never guided yet. Whilst the novelty of the change exists you will be a paragon, after that—Rhoda Tregancy! Oh! my fine fellow, my prince of castle-builders," turning to me with an evil smile, "how well you think the cards have been played that secures you this great prize. Enjoy the game you have won when the brain is cooler, and remember me in days to come."

Mr. Creeney being accustomed to higher words and more gesticulation, took the feigned coolness of brother and sister for a relenting on both sides, and broke in with—

"There, there, no more of it; it is all over, and can't be helped now. Don't let us have any more *rows*. Shake hands with Rhoda, John, and wish her joy."

John drew back hastily, and put his right hand behind him.

"No, no."

"I have not offered to forget the past, neither do I seek for his fair words," said Rhoda, "I have done with him!"

"Glad tidings," replied Tregancy, in the same suppressed tones, "that will make the house more bearable from this date. And now, Mr. Creeney, I have done with *you*."

"What—what—John!"

"Do you know what to-day is? You should remember it; I am one and twenty!"

"Good gracious!—so you are."

"How well you bear my birthday in remembrance. What a shower of congratulations fall to my share on this seventeenth day in February! I begin life from to-day—I start with fresh faces—all the old have turned traitors and deceived me—I am my own master now, and I call upon you, Mr. Greeney, to resign your stewardship."

"When it pleases you—when things can be settled," said Mr. Greeney, with a flash of spirit.

"It is singular, that Rhoda and I start afresh from to-day," said he; "that my amiable sister jumps at a husband in a miller's clerk, on the very day I come of age. It will serve to endear that day to me. My birthdays have been full of pleasant memories, and this is one additional."

"Has Mr. Tregancymore to say ere I leave him?" asked Rhoda.

"I could give husband and wife much valuable advice, if they were disposed to take it; could lecture the wife on the folly of marrying a man before settling her fortune on herself; could laugh at the husband who has taken such a woman as you for a helpmate in his greed of gain. But I have done."

He turned away, dropped into the chair I had quitted, reached a decanter of wine, and, filling a glass at his side, raised it in the air—

"May she make you as happy, Philip Farley, as she made her brother!"

He drank the wine off and refilled his glass.

"Here's John Tregancy's health. It is proposed by his only friend—a stanch one, notwithstanding. Here's fair sailing to one and twenty!"

Rhoda, leaning on my arm, moved towards the door, Mr. Greeney following, and John Tregancy watching us, veering round in the chair as we passed him, and keeping his eyes fixed on the little wedding party till it vanished. On the stairs, Rhoda paused. The ties of kindred were strong, and in that moment the woman's heart gushed forth.

"I—I think that I will go back to him and shake hands. It is his birthday, he is one and twenty—I used to look forward to this day once. Shall I go back, Philip?"

"If you desire it, Rhoda. I fear no good result will follow."

"If we never meet again, at least I shall not have parted with an angry word."

She withdrew her hand from my arm, and ran back to the room. Doubtful how far John Tregancy might be trusted, I stood by the door, watching brother and sister.

"John, shall we shake hands?"

"No."

"Less frequent meetings may make us more tolerant of each other's faults. Shall we let the past die from this day, John?"

"Is this Philip Farley's prompting?"

"No,—my own."

"No matter. I shall not shake hands, neither shall I make any promises to Mrs. Farley."

"For the last time?"

"No, not if it was the last time on earth, and I stood at your dying bed!"

"Enough."

Rhoda resigned her brother for her husband. We went down the broad staircase together, and left John Tregancy to the relics of the wedding feast.

"Philip, I have given him up for ever," sighed Rhoda.

"Time will bring round a reconciliation."

"I have said before, that the Tregancys are unforgiving."

"There are moments in life when the sternest may be touched."

"Ah! when my brother John seems softened and offers us his hand, there will be a motive for the act."

"Rhoda, I can hardly call this calmness."

"I have struggled to be calm, and my success has surprised me. You must bear with my first effort. Oh! Philip, ever love me,—I will be the best of wives to you!"

"I feel assured of that, Rhoda."

"And you will be to me a kind, good husband?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"You are the one spar to which I cling in the deep sea—I have seen father, mother, brother, all my hopes of life go down—I am left only you to live for! If you fail me in the future, I must sink."

"We shall be a very happy couple, or—"

"Or what?—you pause."

"Or we shall sink together!"

And so, full of promises and doubts, we started on our wedding tour, and Eaton Square, Mr. Creeney, and Black Jack, were soon many miles away.

## BOOK V.

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"I cannot tell, not I, why she  
Awhile so gracious, now should be  
So grave: I cannot tell you why  
The violet hangs its head awry."

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR.

"Sir, I'm no boy; I'm deep in one and twenty."

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

## CHAPTER I.

## AT HOME.

Two months from the day on which I, Philip, took her, Rhoda, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from that day forward, we were at home to our friends and acquaintances.

Our friends and acquaintances were few, and did not greatly trouble us in our villa at Hammersmith; we were happy in ourselves, and those who came to see us and offer their congratulations could not make us happier.

Mr. Creeney was the first to call with news of the old home and John Tregancy. Mr. Creeney had resigned his charge, and John Tregancy had become his own master, broken up the establishment in Eaton Square, and quartered himself at a West End hotel. Mr. Creeney had met Tregancy once since he had launched himself on the world, and amiable one and twenty had nearly broken the old gentleman's heart by marching past him in the street, without a sign of recognition.

Mr. Creeney, after the relation of his troubles, cried, and rocked himself in the chair, making himself and the young married couple he had come to see particularly uncomfortable. He cheered up before he bade us good-day, however, and went away in the best of tempers, smiling like a cherub, because he was invited to dinner next Sunday.

"Look out for a little place in the neighbourhood, pray do," were his last words, "I'm a fish out of water, and must come to Hammersmith; something serious will happen, Mr. Farley, if I don't see Rhoda once or twice a week."

"We shall be always glad to see you, Sir."

"Thank you, thank you."

Away trotted the old gentleman down the garden walk, looking back from time to time, and nodding his head at husband and wife, who were watching his departure.

The next day there came a wedding gift in the shape of a handsome time-piece, with Mr. Creeney's love to Rhoda.

"You told me once that you were without a friend in the world, Rhoda," said I; "you had forgotten Mr. Creeney."

"Ah ! my heart was very full of sadness, and I had forgotten everything but Philip !"

A gentleman presenting the strongest contrast to Mr. Creney was the next to call upon us, a gentleman to whose appearance I had not looked forward, knowing his antipathy to everything out of the common way—no less a personage than my Uncle Barchard.

He came into the room with the old black, shiny bag in his hand—that bag which had carried away many thousands of ready money in its day. There were no tears, no affectionate greetings, no felicitations bestowed ; he changed his money-bag from his right hand to his left to shake hands with me in his old fishy manner, and he only nodded to Rhoda and said, "Hope I see you well, Mrs. Farley," in his deepest bass.

"You have forestalled me by this kind visit, Mr. Barchard," I said ; "I had intended to bring Mrs. Farley to Southwark Bridge Road in the course of the week."

"Always glad to see you."

Mrs. Farley requested Mr. Barchard to be seated, and Mr. Barchard dropped into the largest and easiest chair he could find, retaining his hold of his money-bag, as if he was doubtful of its security.

"How is Ellen ?" I asked.

"Getting better."

"Getting better," I exclaimed ; "has she been ill ?"

"Well ! she has not been ill," replied my uncle, "she has been—at least, *I* don't know what has been the matter with her—I don't think that she knows herself."

"I am sorry to hear this."

"Philip," said Rhoda to me, "we will call to-morrow on Miss Barchard."

"Girls are always ill," commented my uncle, "poor weakly things, the best of them, and Ellen is about one of the best."

Uncle Barchard was proud of his Ellen, though he fancied his cold grave manners hid the father's love from the world—even from his child.

"And how is business ?" I inquired.

"Well, well—very well indeed," answered my uncle, in a more hearty manner ; "nothing to complain of."

"And Mr. Crawley ?"

"Mr. Crawley and I have dissolved partnership."



"That is great news."

"He was getting old and infirm. A strange man ; no strength of mind in him."

"Then the mill is——"

"Barchard's mill."

"I wish it every success, Sir."

"Thank'ee."

Uncle Barchard looked round him, glanced at our new furniture, at the pattern of the carpet, at the bow-window, beyond which lay our garden bright with flowers, bounded by the river Thames.

The survey of the little landscape seemed to awaken in him, perhaps for the first time in his life, the faintest appreciation of the beauties of Nature, for as he directed his gaze from the window, he said—

"You have a pretty look out here."

"Yes," said Rhoda, "it is very pretty."

"For those who like it," added Mr. Barchard, in a retractible spirit.

"I am sure Mr. Barchard cannot say from his heart that he is no lover of the country," said Rhoda.

"Yes, I can though," observed Mr. Barchard.

"Business may have led you to forget its charms, but not to disavow them, surely."

"I think the country is very stupid—very stupid indeed."

"What, the corn-fields, too?"

Wonder of wonders, Mr. Barchard smiled.

"Ah ! corn-fields are sensible things—some good in *them*. But as for flowers, I can't see their object."

"Not a word against flowers, Mr. Barchard," cried Rhoda, gaily ; "flowers are the ladies' favourites. I am certain your daughter Ellen is very fond of flowers."

"There are some red and yellow things stuck about the mantelpiece occasionally."

"Then you do not admire flowers, Sir?" persisted Rhoda.

"I do not, Ma'am," replied my uncle, "I think there is something very disagreeable about them."

"I will make a convert of you," said Rhoda, rising ; "Philip, do not let Mr. Barchard go for five minutes."

Mr. Barchard looked at his watch.

"I have fifty calls to make. I——"

"I will not detain you longer than five minutes."

Rhoda tripped down the stone steps which led from the bow-

window to the garden, leaving uncle and nephew to discourse more soberly together.

"Glad to see your wife so happy, Philip. She seems an amiable young woman."

"She is all that is good," said I, wondering if John Tregancy would have agreed with me on that point.

"And now, Philip Farley, what do you mean to do with yourself?"

"To do with myself, Sir?"

"Ay—you do not mean to waste away your life here, I suppose."

"I hope not."

"You are too young, too energetic, to sit with folded arms contented with your station, to lose every chance of making money because you have received a small fortune with your wife."

"I shall not be idle, Mr. Barchard; I have always intended to solicit your advice, Sir."

"Money makes money. When will you be twenty-one?"

"In about nine months."

"Give those nine months to the study of the corn trade, to accompanying me to Mark Lane and the mills, to seeing how I work, and with what means. Are you tired of the mills?"

"No, Sir."

"You would prefer a stirring life to sitting idle, Philip?"

"You are right, Sir."

"Shall I tell you what you can do at twenty-one? What you can do, or let alone?"

"If you please, Mr. Barchard."

"You can become my partner—you can help to make the firm of Barchard and Farley the first on the Corn Exchange, by that perseverance and that study of figures for which you are—don't think I mean it as a compliment—remarkable. I don't know how much money you would be prepared to put into the firm, on that of course would depend your share of the profits—when there are any."

"I thank you for the offer, Sir,—it is a kind one. I will do my best and strive my hardest for the next nine months. It will be a proud day when I come of age."

"You think it will suit you?"

"To be sure it will, Sir," replied I, with flushed cheeks; "I am fond of business, and its study. Ah! Sir, who would have

thought of this, when I was your boy at seven shillings a-week?"

"I did."

"You, Sir?"

"I thought you were just the fellow to work your way to clerk, senior clerk, collector, agent, partner. One can pretty well guess what the man of forty will be, when the youth is steady and saving."

"And I am to begin from one and twenty, instead of from forty years of age—a great advantage."

"You will have more time to make a fortune for yourself and your children. Talk it over with your wife, Philip Farley."

Uncle Barchard rose.

"You will wait for Mrs. Farley?"

"It is getting late—the five minutes are up," said he, looking at his watch again; "I have to perform several hard tasks to-day. Customers to threaten with writs and bankruptcy, unless they pay their debts better—the scoundrels! No, I cannot wait."

Rhoda, with an immense bouquet in her hand, entered from the garden.

"There, Mr. Barchard, look at the gleanings from my parterres and greenhouse, and say you detest flowers ever again!"

Mr. Barchard stared at the bouquet.

"I'm not going out with *that* in my hand."

"Yes, Sir, you are."

"Call on my customers for money with those flowers! Not if I know it," said Uncle Barchard, decisively.

"They will only admire them."

"They will think I have gone mad—that's all."

"But you will take them?" urged Rhoda, in a coaxing manner.

"No."

"Your daughter, Ellen, is very fond of flowers; will you give these to her, with her new cousin's love, please?"

She pushed the bouquet into Uncle Barchard's hand, which instinctively closed on it.

"Well, Ellen may like the flowers," muttered he; "we have not any of these things growing near Southwark Bridge. I'll hide them at the back of the chaise till I get home."

"And you will carry them home safely?"

"I'll try and not sit on them—but they will be awfully in the way."

"And give them to Ellen?"

"Yes, to Ellen."

Mr. Barchard, huge bouquet in one hand, and money-bag in the other—the wealth of Nature and the wealth of the world—poetry and fact—bade us good-day and waddled along the front garden to his chaise. He was very particular, too, about a safe place for the flowers at the back of the chaise, before he mounted—the flowers for his daughter, Ellen, who was ill at home, and to whom he was desirous of taking them in a good state of preservation.

"Honest Uncle Barchard," said I, as he drove off; "I believe that you will think more of your daughter than your customers this day, for all the business schemes which keep that brain so busy."

"He is a good man, I have heard," said Rhoda; "but I should be sorry to see my Philip resemble him."

"For what reason, Rhoda?"

"He is too worldly; he thinks too much of what will never make him happy."

"That is money?"

"Yes."

We went back to our room—from the room to the garden which ran to the water's edge—that garden bright with *unprofitable* flowers!

"My Uncle Barchard has made me an offer this morning, Rhoda."

"Indeed!"

"An offer of partnership, when I am one and twenty."

She looked grave.

"What need of it?"

"Ah! Rhoda, you would have life one honeymoon. All the pleasure of life, without the labour to sweeten it."

"Are you tired of that life, Philip, and anxious to get back into the world—to thoughts with which I shall have nothing to do, aspirations with which I shall never sympathise, or be able to understand?"

"Rhoda, it is the duty of mankind to work—mankind is taught so by the labour of everything around it," I answered; "I would do my duty with the rest, and take my place in the world of working men. I cannot remain idle all my life—I am sure Rhoda Farley would not wish me."

"No; but," with a sigh, "we are very happy now. And I am jealous of everything that will take a thought from me."

"Shall I think less of you, dear?"

"Yes; when the cares of a great business begin to furrow that forehead, and speculations and money-making to rob you of your peace—and mine. Why are you not content, Philip?"

"I will tell you one great reason, Rhoda."

"Well."

Walking side by side, her fond hands on my arm, her face looking into mine, I said—

"I am living on my wife's money, supported alone in my position by it—is that just to Rhoda or myself? Shall I show to my friends—the few I have—that I am satisfied with the change, and think it honourable to sit here supinely, letting youth and energy pass me in the race? No, Rhoda, I must still work. If I struggle for higher prizes, I shall only work the harder."

"Work, that in the end you may say, I am by so many thousand pounds a richer man."

"Yes, and that I may add, I took a fortune with my wife, and instead of dissipating it, doubled it."

"That sounds mercenary."

"Not to you, Rhoda, who understand my reason."

"No; yet, Philip, do not think more of money than of me. I must be first in your thoughts, even on Mark Lane—for I am very jealous!"



## CHAPTER II.

### TALK.

ON the following day, Rhoda and I went to Uncle Barchard's house in accordance with our promise. It was seven o'clock in the evening, and we found Uncle Barchard reading his newspaper in the drawing-room—how old-fashioned and ugly that room seemed!—and keeping Ellen company in the absence of Mrs. Holts, who had gone to a prayer-meeting with her Edward.

Two months had made a great change in Ellen, she was looking very pale, and ill. She rose as we entered the room, and there was a little embarrassment in her manner of receiving Rhoda which almost instantly wore off.

"Well, Philip," said she, "so you have returned again. What a change in you since our last meeting—little did I think there was marriage in your thoughts that Sunday evening, Sir cousin."

Why did my voice tremble as I replied?

"I was not engaged then."

"Indeed. Mrs. Farley," turning to my wife, "I have to thank you for those beautiful flowers—I am very fond of flowers."

"Ah! I knew she was, Mr. Barchard," said Rhoda.

"But I did not," answered Mr. Barchard, as he put away his newspaper; "Ellen never told me she was fond of flowers before. Sit down, Mrs. Farley, Philip,—make yourselves at home."

"Mr. Barchard," said Rhoda, "is our acquaintance of too early a date for me to request a favour?"

"N—no," replied Mr. Barchard, in a hesitative manner.

The possibility of Rhoda requiring an immediate loan suggested itself to Mr. Barchard, and his lips compressed slightly with the fear.

"You must let me carry your daughter back with me to Hammersmith—she is not looking well, and I am sure the change will do her good."

"Oh! no, no, thank you," hastily cried Ellen, "not yet, not so suddenly—I am not strong enough for the journey, Mrs. Farley."

"The journey is but a short one in our chaise."

"Thank you—but you must excuse me for the present."

"Philip, I hope you will not excuse her," said Rhoda; "come, you are an older friend; exert your influence with Miss Barchard."

"I think with Mrs. Farley that the change will do you good, Ellen," I remarked, "I hope to shortly see you and Rhoda the dearest and the best of friends, and you cannot lay too soon the groundwork of that friendship."

"You are very kind, Philip, but I will come some day when I am stronger."

"Why not get stronger with us at Hammersmith?"

"No," she replied, "I will not make my first appearance at your house in the character of an invalid. Give me a week or two to recover my strength, then I will come."

Ellen would not give way though even Mr. Barchard added his persuasions, and her father's wishes had been ever

a law to her. She would come when she was better, and with that promise we were compelled to remain content.

Half an hour afterwards Rhoda and Ellen were chatting familiarly together, and Ellen's languid look had disappeared in the earnestness of conversation—a conversation in which neither I nor my uncle joined, being too deeply concerned in a debate on the rise and fall of flour to pay any attention to topics less heavy in their nature.

Whilst thus engaged, a tremendous banging at the street door knocker roused the echoes of the house. Mr. Barchard, who detested a noise, elevated his eyebrows and growled in an undertone,

“Who the devil's that?”

“I think that is Mrs. Tackeridge,” suggested Ellen.

“I hope not,” muttered Uncle Barchard.

Uncle Barchard's hopes were doomed to disappointment, for, in a few minutes, Mrs. Tackeridge, accompanied by her lord and master, sailed into the room.

Mrs. Tackeridge, weighed down by a silk dress with an incredible number of flounces, smiled graciously at everybody, and her lord and master, more agile and impetuous, gave two bounds into the room like an Italian brother, and shook hands affectionately with each of us.

“My dear Mr. Farley,” cried he, when it came to my turn, “how pleased I am to see you, to be sure! And now—when will you give us a look in at Wheatsheaf Villa?”

“Really I—I have not decided on any particular day at present.”

“We should be so honoured,” chimed in Mrs. Tackeridge—I had never seen that lady so sweet tempered and amiable before; “we should be so delighted if Mr. and Mrs. Farley would but favour us with a visit.”

Rhoda, in a few words, expressed her thanks for the invitation, and made inquiry concerning the health of Miss Tackeridge.

“She is well—yes, she is pretty well, Mrs. Farley, thank you,” replied Mrs. Tackeridge, with her first-class-quality air; “I hope your brother is the same.”

“I have not heard to the contrary,” said Rhoda; “Mr. Tregancy seldom troubles his sister with his company.”

“I had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Tregancy last week—met him quite accidentally as it were at a flower-show—what a gentleman he is—what a nice young man! Mrs. Farley, you must be very proud of him?”

"If you saw Mr. Tregancy last week, Mrs. Tackeridge," said Rhoda, "it is I who should make inquiry concerning that gentleman's health."

"You have not seen him since last week?"

"I have not seen him for two months."

"Really—really, that is great inattention on the part of Mr. Tregancy. I shall rate him for it—I shall read him quite a lecture."

Mrs. Tackeridge shook her head and laughed merrily. Rhoda looked full in the broad face of the baker's wife, and smiled not.

"I shall read him quite a lecture," repeated Mrs. Tackeridge.

"I do not understand you," Rhoda said, with lips compressed.

"Why, I expect to see Mr. Tregancy shortly. He promised to come to dinner—let me see, my poor head is not a good one at dates—Tackeridge, my dear, when did Mr. Tregancy say he would dine with us?"

"Next Sunday."

"Ah! next Sunday, and then I shall——"

"And then you will not mention my name to Mr. Tregancy, if you please, Madam," said Rhoda, loftily; "it would afford him little pleasure."

"Oh!"

Mrs. Tackeridge looked vacantly at Rhoda—the good lady appeared completely extinguished. Mr. Tackeridge and Mr. Barchard were not listening to the ladies; but I, who was interested in the conference, and half fearful lest the name of John Tregancy should excite my wife, watched the feminine group with no little anxiety. Mrs. Tackeridge began to collect herself.

"Really, I hope—that is, I was not aware that Mr. Tregancy and yourself were—ahem! on indifferent terms."

"I have not said that my brother and I were on indifferent terms, Mrs. Tackeridge."

"No—but—dear me, how very warm it is to-day!"

"I think it very sultry for the time of year," added Ellen.

Conversation changed—general rush to the grand harbour of refuge for destitute talkers—the glorious weather!

I wonder how many people have been saved from shipwreck, by holding on to the weather—how the world would get on without any weather to talk about. How would the gentleman who calls to borrow money begin his statement—what would become of all the bashful side couples in the first set, and of



the sentimental couples in corners at evening parties, and what would that mysterious simpering *he* do,—he whom papa and mamma know nothing about, Juliet!—next time he met you by accident in Kensington Gardens?

So the weather allowed time for the flush to die away on Rhoda's cheek, and gave the discomfited Mrs. Tackeridge the opportunity to recover herself. Conversation entrenched on less delicate ground; the ladies talked of Annie, and the fashions; the gentlemen, of politics and trade. Trade took the precedence with the sterner sex, Mr. Barchard and Mr. Tackeridge being men of business. Mr. Tackeridge got to the subject of his shops, and was not backward in congratulating himself on his many successful speculations.

"Never lose money, you know—one shop supports the other. Crack prices in Pimlico and New Road—down again, like thunder, in the East. By the way, my dear Mr. Barchard, I did not see you on Mark Lane, last Monday."

"I left early."

"You might have got an order out of me, you might, indeed; I was in a buying humour. What is your selling price now?"

"Sixty-three."

"You don't mean that!" with evident astonishment; "why you are dearer than any town miller in the trade."

"Better quality," said Mr. Barchard, briefly.

"I thought about sixty-one, now?"

"Couldn't do it."

Mr. Tackeridge made no second offer, and my uncle sat twirling his thumbs, and regarding with interest the broad back of Mrs. Tackeridge.

Mr. Barchard, I had every reason to believe, was not anxious to secure an order from the prince of bakers.

Mr. and Mrs. Tackeridge made but a short stay at Southwark Bridge Road. Mrs. Tackeridge was uncomfortable, out of her element, and half-frightened of Rhoda, and her husband's lively humour had begun to flag from the moment of Mr. Barchard's refusal of sixty-one shillings per sack. Therefore, it was not long before Mrs. Tackeridge rose, and Mr. Tackeridge imitated her example.

"And now, my dear Ellen, when shall we have the pleasure of seeing you at Wheatsheaf Villa?" asked Mrs. Tackeridge; "Annie insists upon your naming a very early day."

Ellen expressed her regrets, spoke of the invitation which

she had already accepted, and hoped that Annie would call and see her shortly. A general shaking of hands ensued, after which the Tackeridges started for Wheatsheaf Villa, Brixton. Rhoda and I lingered till a later hour; my uncle and I had a great deal to talk over, and Rhoda and Ellen were making the best of the opportunity and becoming bosom friends. Rhoda spoke of her brother, shed a few passionate tears over their estrangement, and related, in the fullness of her heart, many a story of their past quarrels.

Ellen, who always looked at the bright side of life, said—

“Brother and sister form a tie too close for a few angry words to sunder. You will be better friends than ever, some day.”

Rhoda shook her head.

“You do not know John Treganey, or his sister.”

“I can guess the character of the sister, I think,” said Ellen, smiling.

“No, no.”

“Shall I tell you my idea of Mrs. Farley’s character?”

“I am curious to know it.”

“Impulsive, warm-hearted, quick to resent an injury, and quick to forgive it.”

“I shall not forgive my brother John.”

“One month hence you will be friends again; brother and sister have no right to be enemies.”

“When the brother is like mine, it is better to be separated from him.”

“Philip,” appealed Ellen, “do you believe that Rhoda is an unforgiving woman?”

“Rhoda is a stern young woman, Ellen,—in theory.”

“Are you against me, too?” cried Rhoda, lightly; “remember, Sir, you may require forgiveness some day, and find that I can be very stern in practice.”

“But——”

“But keep to your figures and business-talk, Philip,” said Rhoda; “I have to besiege my new cousin’s heart to-night, and talk of my failings will steel that heart against me.”

I became more matter-of-fact, arranged plans with Uncle Barchard for my future course, settled the day on which I was to go on the Corn Exchange, begin my new studies and lay the foundation of a very large fortune. Still talking of the future like vain dreamers, forgetting that the future is a mystery, when Mrs. Holts came into the room and was formally introduced to Rhoda. The introduction of Mr. Barchard’s house-

keeper and Ellen's lively companion to my wife did not appear to give any great satisfaction to the former lady; for Mrs. Holts, after a sharp emphatic nod, signifying, "I know you, Ma'am, and am none the better for that," retreated into a corner—she was fond of corners,—and assumed a statuesque appearance. The corner in question being near me, and Mrs. Holts having failed to acknowledge my existence, I gallantly approached the lady, and hoped that I saw her well in health and in spirits.

"Oh! is that you, Mr. Farley?" observed Mrs. Holts, "my eyes are getting worse. Yes, I'm well enough."

"I am sorry to see Ellen looking so ill."

"You!"

Mrs. Holts was evidently getting worse in the head as well as the eyes.

"Yes, I am."

"Oh! are you?" muttered Mrs. Holts.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Holts, but does my regret for my cousin Ellen's indisposition appear to you remarkable?"

All this in an undertone.

"Well, perhaps not—your wife is rather like her brother."

"There is a strong resemblance," I said, surprised at the sudden change of conversation.

"Her brother is a bad young man; you need not bring him to this house; nobody wants him here, remember."

Not being able to account for the Sphinx-like manner of the good lady, I was withdrawing from her presence when she said, in a husky whisper:

"Mr. Farley."

I returned.

"What I have said to you about *her* brother I hope you will not repeat again, especially to Miss Ellen; I rely on you as a gentleman."

"You may rely on me, Mrs. Holts."

"You will excuse me taking such a liberty, with a rich man, too! but I was always a plain-spoken woman. I was a wonderful woman, too, before my nerves gave way."

"Decidedly mad," thought I, as I returned to Uncle Barchard, leaving Mrs. Holts in the corner, from which she did not emerge the remainder of the evening, not even to take leave of us.

When Rhoda and I were returning home in our chaise, my wife said—

"Mrs. Holts is a strange, uncivilised woman to be your cousin's friend, or companion, Philip. Is she a relation?"

"A distant relation of the late Mrs. Barchard, I believe."

"A singular woman."

"You have seen my cousin Ellen at Ramsgate once or twice," said I, "and now once at her own home. May I ask, Rhoda, if you have formed an opinion of her yet?"

"Yes."

"A favourable one, of course?"

"Why of course, Sir?" she asked.

"Ellen Barchard is——"

"No matter what she is, Mr. Philip," said Rhoda, jestingly; "I do not wish to hear Miss Barchard's praises from the lips of my husband. I am getting jealous."

"Well! your opinion, Rhoda."

"Not my opinion, but my wonder."

"Wonder?"

"My wonder that Philip Farley did not fall in love with his cousin Ellen, instead of Rhoda Tregancy."

I started.

"You are silent?"

"Am I?" said I, whipping the horse; "I was thinking of your brother."

"You ask for my opinion, and then think of John Tregancy!"

"To think of Ellen is to think of your brother John."

"Explain, mysterious husband mine."

"John Tregancy fell in love with Ellen Barchard once, and offered her his hand."

"My brother proposed to Miss Barchard!" she exclaimed; "is it possible? and your cousin Ellen——"

"Refused him."

"Oh! if it had been otherwise—poor John! poor John! perhaps this disappointment is the secret of his unsteady life."

"Was he steady at Ramsgate, at college, anywhere?"

"Ah! no, but if he had married Ellen Barchard before he was one and twenty, what a different man he might have been."

"Is it an unforgiving woman speaking, Rhoda?"

"I think of my brother with the feelings of years ago, till there follows a remembrance that turns my heart to stone."

"My dear Rhoda, there is no stone in your heart; I shall never believe it."

"And so Miss Barchard refused my brother; was she engaged to any one else?"

"No."

"Nor in love with any one else?"

"I was not in her confidence."

"How came you to learn the news of this proposal, then?"

"From her father."

"Miss Barchard tells me that she has been ill two months."

She drew her shawl round her, and shivered.

"Are you cold, Rhoda?"

"The night is chilly."

"When do you think Ellen will be well enough to come to Hammersmith?" I asked.

"I wonder what my brother John wants at Mr. Tackeridge's? Is he looking for a wife there?"

"There is a fair daughter at Wheatsheaf Villa," said I; "it is likely."

"Ah! she would not do for John."

"When do you think Ellen will be well enough to pay her promised visit?" I asked again.

"Soon, I hope. Oh! how cold it is to-night,—for the end of May, too. Philip, you must sell this chaise, and treat me to a brougham. Drive faster—it's very cold!"

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE ART OF BUSINESS.

SINCE my return to town I had seen nothing of the Esdens. I had sent to each member of the family my wedding cards, and had expected Frank and Charley to call upon me, or at least to write me a word or two of congratulation, but no sign of the past friendship was made from Dover Road, and Philip Farley seemed forgotten.

The neglect pained me, for Frank and Charley had been my elder brothers, and my affection for them was of no light kind. I had thought to live in their remembrance longer than this, but it was not to be; with my new life before me, there were new friends to make—all the old ones were falling fast away.

I turned to business—I set my mind to study Uncle Barchard's art of money-making, I fostered the ambitious dreams

of raising a colossal fortune from the riches I had gained by marriage—it was a title worth winning, and worth striving for—"A VERY RICH MAN!"

Every one revered a rich man, looked after him in the street, whispered his name as he passed, and felt inclined to grovel in the dust when he uttered a few gracious words. Very good men and very clever men only excited partial interest, often none at all, but a very rich man was the centre of a system, and had always a host of satellites revolving round him to do his bidding, get through his dirty work, make him even a member of parliament, or a baron of the United Kingdom. There was only one thing which could interfere with a rich man's desires, balk him in his hour of conquest and snatch away the prizes from his grasp, a thing drawn by imaginative artists with a skeleton frame and a crowned skull. That thing has few terrors for youth, it is seen too much in perspective—the spring of life warms the blood in the veins, and the crowned mystery is for the autumn and winter, when the pulse gets weak and the eyes grow blind. I thought that the far-away time might have its terrors for me some day, but I had not time to think of it then;—my mind was bent on the great one-idea, and I went on the Corn Exchange and looked about me earnestly.

"Away with romance and fancy from this date," I thought; "I am a married man—a business man. There must be nothing to distract my thoughts from the grand future before me."

A great fortune!—Uncle Barchard was making one, and I was to be his partner and make one also. I should be happy when I was very rich, for though I had a comfortable home, and Rhoda for a wife, had no more petty thoughts of saving shillings in a money-box, was possessed of a banker's book and some bank stock, still I was not happy. It was singular that I was really no more contented than when I lived with the Esdens; perhaps I missed Frank and Charley, missed going to office every morning and fagging at the great account-books, missed my Sunday dinner at Uncle Barchard's, missed Ellen's face. I knew that I missed Ellen's face, I had done so even in my honeymoon! Perhaps Ellen's illness made me dull and thoughtful, too, for the prospect of Ellen coming to Hammersmith even interfered with my business-speculations, and troubled me a great deal.

Rhoda's fortune had brought its responsibilities with it;

her money was lying idle, not turning itself in my hands, and making cent. per cent. I wanted to be Uncle Barchard's partner at once, and set the wheels of a hundred schemes in motion.

So weeks went on, the summer sun shone out, Ellen was getting better and talking of her promised visit, Rhoda was becoming jealous of my labours.

"You are forgetting me already," she pouted.

"Have we not already argued the point, Rhoda? did you not own there was a worthy motive in my desire for business?"

"Yes, yes; but I wish you were at home more often, or that you would return home with a face less full of care. You are altering, I fear."

Rhoda's little fits of petulance had to be appeased by a strict attention to domestic matters for the remainder of the evening, by reading aloud a novel of the day in which I took no interest, by an occasional treat to the opera, where she sat entranced, and where I fell asleep invariably, or by a regular lover's ramble in the green lanes near Hammersmith, where we looked more like the young married couple over whom the rosy clouds still hovered.

I became an extra-collector in my Uncle Barchard's service, went a certain round, made myself acquainted with the customers, and called with the day's cash at Southwark Bridge Road or the Thames Street mills.

At the mills, one evening at seven o'clock, I met the brothers Esden for the first time. The work of the day was over, half the clerks had departed, Mr. Holts was locking up the books, and Frank and Charley were filing some receipts.

We all three coloured, and as I shook hands with the brothers I missed that old friendly pressure which had seemed to spring straight from the heart.

"Well, Frank, Charley," said I, reproachfully, "I did not think that I was to be thrown overboard so soon, or that my change in life was to incur a change in all old friends."

"Such a change as yours," replied Frank, "makes many new acquaintances, and sets you so far above the old, that the latter know hardly how to act."

"I hope no one of the name of Esden thought that I should forsake the old for the new, or give up the tried for the untried?"

"Well, I did not — there," said Charley, shaking hands again with greater warmth, "I am very glad to see you, Phil. I told Frank that you were not the man to turn your back upon us."

"Did Frank think I *was* the man?"

Frank spoke for himself.

"My dear Phil, this old fellow," pointing to his brother, "knows nothing of the world—he's a large baby in arms still. I have seen plenty of friends change in my time, turn up their noses at me because their fortunes had improved and mine had diminished; why should I think you an exception to the rule?"

"Is it the rule, Frank?"

"I think so. Then we all know there is to be an addition to the firm; you are to be our master, and for the master to make friends of his clerks is a bad principle, and won't answer. No, no, Phil, let our old friendship die away; I for one shall be sorry, but there remains no help for it. We shall thus stop plenty of talk, hinder jealousy in our fellow-clerks, be easier in mind ourselves."

"Do you think that I am going to agree to this, Frank?"

"There is no help for it, I see now," said Charley; "we can never meet again on the same footing. There will always be a restraint—people will say that we are toadying you for a rise in salary, or a lift in the office—taking advantage of your youth."

A warm argument arose on this question, but the Esden opinions were not to be shaken—the pride of the poor gentleman's sons was greater than my own. I should be master, they would be servants; social distinctions were to sever the ties that had bound us together. I was to become richer in purse, but poorer in true friends.

We parted, I maintaining time should not change us, the brothers shaking their heads, and saying, no effort of mine could prevent it.

I made the effort. I did not like to give them up; money had not caused my heart to beat coldly for headstrong Frank, or his quiet, steady brother. I could not imagine that I was ever to be their master, give them my orders, and see every wish of mine attended to.

I went to Dover Road once or twice, I sat in my old place at the table, I talked of the past with the past friends around me; but I was a rich man, and the Esdens were not happy in



my society. There was too much respect from the sons, too great an effort at familiarity from the father, and everything was studied. Therefore I went back to my home, my grandeur, and my wife—went back alone, discontented !

On Mark Lane so often, I had more opportunity of seeing Mr. Tackeridge, and of observing how Uncle Barchard avoided his society. Being on very friendly terms with Mr. Barchard I inquired, one day, the reasons for his singular behaviour.

"I don't care to do business with him," replied my uncle ; "he is not so ready to pay as he used to be ; he shoves bills on you drawn at three and four months' date ; he speculates too much ; he talks too much about his ten and twenty thousands."

"I thought Mr. Tackeridge was a rich man."

"I don't say that he is not," replied my careful uncle ; "there is not a miller on the Exchange, beside myself, who would refuse him a thousand sacks—I daresay I am over careful."

"He buys of you occasionally."

"Very seldom. I ask a higher price, and he don't like it," answered Mr. Barchard ; "but that's enough about *him*."

"When is Ellen coming to Hammersmith ?"

"In a day or two, I believe."

"You must come and see her once or twice a-week, Mr. Barchard ?"

"I never go out."

"But to a nephew's house—a future partner's—to see your daughter Ellen, too !"

"Ah ! we'll talk about that some other time. Philip, my lad, you have one fault."

"What is that, Sir ?"

"You talk too much on Mark Lane concerning things that have nothing to do with it. It's a very bad habit."

Uncle Barchard, shaking his head gravely, left me to meditate upon the reproof.

On my return, that evening, Rhoda met me with a letter from Ellen Barchard in her hand.

"She is coming at last !" she cried, "I am very glad, Philip. The change will do her a great deal of good—will do me good, too."

"Are you very ill, Rhoda ?" I inquired, with a smile.

"It will do me good because I have been unused to the

companionship of one of my own sex; if I had had a sister I should have been a different woman."

"My dear Rhoda, I thought that you had given up that habit of self-reproach," said I, "there is no occasion for it."

"Why not?"

"Because Mrs. Farley can have nothing wherewith to reproach herself; she is all that is good and gentle."

"Ah! flatterer, you see me at my best. You do not know how I have to fight against my worst when you are absent."

"I don't believe it, Rhoda."

We were happy at that time; it was pleasant to sit by Rhoda's side after the day's business, watch her loving looks, and hear her loving words. It was the romance of Rhoda's life, and I did my best to sustain it. I was trying hard to love her, and her own impassioned attachment should not have made that task a difficult one.

Had we lived in that villa all our lives, and shut the gates in the face of every friend; had Ellen only stayed away—gentle, graceful Ellen, for whose arrival we were watching; she, who was to add a brightness to our home, and make it so much happier!

But Ellen came—and what became of me?



## CHAPTER IV

### A SUDDEN CHANGE.

ELLEN came to our villa at Hammersmith. It was a change for my cousin, from the dull house in Southwark; it was a change for me and Rhoda to see her at our table, sharing in the simple pleasures of our home. To me it was something more than change, something without gradation—it was the beginning of a new life; it brought a sudden happiness, which I hid from wife and cousin, under those methodical habits which were older than my years; it made home to me a new place, of which I never tired, and it altered every thought of mine. I would not acknowledge to myself that it was Ellen's presence alone that worked this alteration in me;—Rhoda

had become attached to my cousin ; Rhoda was beginning to regard Ellen as a younger sister, and it was a great pleasure to see wife and cousin friends !

Ellen's health visibly improved. A fortnight had not passed away before she seemed the cousin of old time, the bright-faced, light-hearted cousin I had known before the wedding-ring was placed on Rhoda's finger. But as the days went on and she grew stronger ; when it seemed as if she was a part of home and there could be no home without her, a secret discontent began to prey upon me, even to stand between me and that business at which I had always studied hard. Then I became dispirited, although to look forward to the day of Ellen's return to Southwark was to rob me of all peace of mind. Yet I would not own that Ellen Barchard had the slightest power to excite or interest me ; she was my cousin, whom I had known from childhood ; she was quite a sister to me. And I must love Rhoda, too, I *did* love her ; the marriage that had taken place for sordid motives, of which my wife was ignorant, had ripened to an attachment steady and true, though unromantic, I was certain of it !

Ellen, what was Ellen to me ? I was married. I had no right to think of her *now* ! All this battling went on in my own heart day after day, all this study to convince myself that Ellen was beyond my thoughts, and that in Rhoda lay my duty and my love. All this battling within, and yet outwardly so calm, so business-like, so interested in account-books and flour orders when I returned from Mark Lane, and found a welcome awaiting me. Rhoda's affection for Ellen increased daily ; Ellen was a companion to her during my absence, and Rhoda, quick and impulsive, began to lavish upon my cousin all that pure disinterested love, which an impressionable nature often exhibits.

That Ellen should be touched by witnessing her rapid advance to a first place in Mrs. Farley's regard was not surprising to me—that she should love her in return and prolong her stay in consequence, was not more remarkable.

Uncle Barchard broke through his established rules, and looked in at my house at uncertain intervals, and as Ellen appeared to be rapidly improving in health he did not press her to return. So three weeks, a month passed by ; I saw her every day ; she sat by my wife's side, and I thought how dark and swarthy Rhoda looked in contrast. I thought how

beautiful Ellen was, too, and wondered who would be her husband in the future days.

One summer evening, in the twilight, before the blinds were drawn, Rhoda and Ellen sat at the window opening on the garden. It was a sultry evening, and not a leaf stirred outside in the summer air. I had been reading, but it had grown too dark to proceed with my book, and I was sitting half in reverie at a distance from the window.

Rhoda had been relating a long story of earlier days before a certain Philip Farley won upon her heart, days when John Tregancy was held dear, and she had not lost all hope in him or his future.

Ellen sat a patient listener.

"I give you all my confidence," cried Rhoda, in her characteristic impatient way, "and you give me nothing in return. What a sly girl you are, Ellen!"

I heard Ellen's low musical laugh as she replied—

"Am I very artful, Mrs. Farley? What is it that you wish to know?"

"For what reason do you think I have brought the conversation round to John Tregancy, Ellen?" asked Rhoda; "is it because all women are inquisitive, and I am curious to know how he came to fall in love with you?"

Ellen laughed again—I think she blushed, but the evening shades were gathering.

"But I cannot say how he came to—to take a fancy to me."

"Philip, this is a lady's secret; don't listen," said Rhoda.

"Oh! I know the story, do I not, Ellen?"

"I believe you do."

"Go on, please," said Rhoda, impatiently.

"There is little to communicate," said Ellen; "your brother was a little impetuous—he takes after his sister, I think, Mrs. Farley,—and he surprised me one day by calling at my father's house and offering me his hand."

"Which you declined?"

"Yes."

"You did not like him, then."

"I thought him a singular young man—a wild young man—a man of whom to be afraid."

"Such a man would not do for Ellen Barchard's husband," said Rhoda.

"A man who has no command over his passions, is not fit to have a wife."

"Have you seen your model husband yet, Ellen? Have you crossed the path of one interesting stranger, to whom you could have whispered 'Yes?' "

"You are very curious," said Ellen, with a toss of her head; "I shall answer no more questions, Lady Pry."

"Ah! you cannot answer, 'No.' "

"What romantic young lady of my age can?"

"You are not romantic."

"Every girl has one romance in the course of her life, I think."

"And yours?"

"Still curious!"

"Oh! look upon me as your elder sister."

"Elder sisters are not always chosen confidants."

"Then you will not tell me?"

"The romance has died away—let it rest in peace!"

I felt assured that there was an under-current of earnestness beneath the light manner which Ellen had assumed.

"Well, you could not take pity on John Tregancy, and that gentleman has gone wooing in another direction. You have lost him for ever, Ellen," said Rhoda.

"Does he go wooing in the direction of Surrey?"

"My suspicions have only Mrs. Tackeridge's manner to rest on; but I may know more some day. Have you seen Miss Tackeridge lately?"

"No."

"Do you think that she would make John a good wife—humour him and keep him steady?"

"I am afraid there is another likeness on her heart, that will prevent her becoming Mrs. Tregancy," answered Ellen.

"Are you sure of that?"

"I think it is probable, though she will not own it."

"Is she ashamed of a true passion?"

"When a true passion is hopeless it is best to disavow it,—at all events, to say nothing concerning it."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

"For what reason?"

"Because to nurse despair is foolish. If I loved, and knew that my love was beyond hope, I would lock the secret in my foolish heart, and throw the key into the great sea."

I was listening intently—I was not thinking of Annie Tackeridge, neither was my cousin Ellen at that moment. *She*

had locked her secret close, and the world—another great sea whose restless tides wash up so many dead hopes—knew nothing of it and could guess nothing of it from the smiles on her face.

“I think,” said Rhoda, after a pause, “that a secret preys upon its possessor—is sometimes too heavy for the heart in which it is buried.”

“Not a love-secret,” answered Ellen; “if I am a little romantic I am not weak-minded, Mrs. Farley. I do not believe in the ‘broken hearts’ of the poet, or take for a model the blighted heroine of the last story book. No one should guess my secret—neither should I think it a disease irremediable. Time will cure the worst love-complaint to which ever poor maiden was a martyr.”

“Will any young lady above fifteen agree to that assertion?” asked Rhoda.

“Every lady over fifty will, and that is the wiser age.”

“Well, we will not discuss the question,” said Rhoda. “It is a delicate one. Philip is going to read to us. Philip, dear, are you asleep?”

“No, Rhoda.”

“How silent you are!”

“I have been acting the eaves-dropper.”

“Then the sooner we dismiss the subject the better.”

The blinds were lowered, lights were set on the table, I opened my book and commenced reading aloud, thinking at the same time of all that had been spoken before that window in the twilight—thinking of the romance of Ellen’s life, began so early, ended so soon. I read, stammered and lost my place, until the volume was finally voted an uninteresting work, and a quiet game at whist was proposed as an amendment. Whist was better, I could think more over my hand, and as neither of the ladies was a whist-player my execrable play was excused or unobserved. But the evening was not destined to pass wholly in a tranquil manner. Still thinking of Ellen, my eyes had wandered from the cards to her face—had become fixed there—were watching Ellen in a dreamy rapt manner that had drawn my attention from everything around me, and lost me in a world of speculation.

What was that secret? Whom had she loved? If—

“Philip,” cried a sharp voice, that for the moment I failed to recognise as Rhoda’s.

I started.

"What is it?" I asked, absently.

"Why do you not play?—what are you looking at? How strange you are!"

"I beg your pardon, Rhoda, I had forgotten."

"True!"

I glanced at Rhoda; she was pale and there was the slightest fluttering at her bosom as if she had been agitated. A moment afterwards she was calm again, and I woke up from my dream.

Two hours hence there was a second awakening. Ellen had bidden us good-night and retired to her room, leaving Rhoda and me lingering at the supper-table.

"In thought again, Philip?"

"Am I?" said I, rousing myself; "you said this business would usurp the greater share of my meditations. I must not let that prophecy come true."

"Were you thinking of your partnership?"

"Yes."

"Were you thinking of money-making and Mark Lane this evening, when Ellen Barchard sat opposite, and you were looking at her?"

"Was I looking at her?"

"Had it been any one but my steady Philip, I should have said 'lost in admiration.'"

I laughed.

"I spoke to you thrice before you answered," said she; "you were very deep in thought—of what?"

"I have forgotten."

"Is that true?" she cried, with an eagerness that startled me.

Another lie was on my tongue, but my conscience rebelled and checked me.

"I remember, Rhoda—I was thinking of those little confessions Ellen made, when you were sitting with her at the garden window. I was puzzling my head to find that key which, as she poetically expressed, had been lost in the great sea."

"Does it matter to Philip Farley, whom his cousin loves or has loved?"

"It is certainly no business of mine."

"Yet, for a man of business, you seem more interested than I have ever known."

"Rhoda, will it please you to explain?"

She coloured as our eyes met, and looked down. The next minute she was at my side, her hands upon my arm.

"Philip, dear, look me in the face again."

I complied with her request.

"You are offended. I am sorry that I have pained you."

"You have not pained me, Rhoda."

"Yes I have ; you must pardon me, I am a foolish woman, —older than you, husband, and more suspicious. I am full of ungenerous thoughts ; a few of them have been with me to-night. I asked you, Philip, to bear with me when you took me for your wife, for my nature was a weak and jealous one."

"Were you jealous to-night, Rhoda ? " said I, colouring too.

"Yes—no—I don't know—I think not—jealous because you looked your cousin in the face !—oh ! what a wicked woman I am."

"I wish I was worthy of you."

"Worthy of a wife who makes her sorrows out of nothing. There, Philip, forgive my little jealous tiff—it is the first and the last."

It was the first sign of jealousy—when the last came I was one and twenty.



## CHAPTER V.

### MY RESOLVES.

ELLEN had begun to talk of home and her father. Time passed on. The day was fixed for her return, and secretly I noted each hour that lessened her stay beneath my roof. Rhoda was sorry to lose her too—the ripple on the stream of wedded life had died away again—she loved Ellen Barchard, and had no mistrust of Philip Farley.

"You will be glad to get back to the old home in Southwark, Ellen ? " I remarked one morning.

"Yes."

"That is spoken heartily," said I, "as heartily as if my cousin was looking forward to her departure as a happy release from a dull married couple."

"I look forward to home without being tired of Mr. or Mrs.



Farley's society," replied Ellen; "I love my father, I know that he will be glad to have me at his side, and that makes me glad."

"Well, we must wait and watch for your coming back," said I; "you will return some day?"

"A long day hence, perhaps," answered she; "if I come too often, Mr. and Mrs. Farley will grow tired of me."

"Never."

Ellen looked up, surprised at my vehement rejoinder, and I became conscious of a scarlet flush sweeping across my face.

"Young married couples, I have heard, are best left to themselves—find the best company in each other's society, therefore, I have been somewhat of an intruder, Philip."

"Indeed."

"I have stood between a romantic young couple before their honeymoon has hardly waned, and though I have been happy here—found a dear friend in your wife—yet I have thought of that old saying which signifies there is no company in three!"

"I hope you have not discovered the truth of that old saying, Ellen?"

"No; I have spent a very pleasant month, and am surprised to find how the month has glided by," said Ellen; "Mrs. Farley has been all that is kind and lovable, quite a sister to me, Philip; you should be very happy."

"I am," I rejoined, in a husky voice.

"When I first heard of your marriage, I formed some unjust suspicions of you, cousin—they have been all withdrawn."

"Unjust, Ellen, what suspicions were they?"

"There is no occasion to repeat them."

"Tell me what was unjust?"

"What I thought unjust, you mean, Philip."

"You have withdrawn your suspicions, you say, Ellen?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me!"

"I thought it was unjust—nay, rather, I was unjust enough to think that the charms lay in the *heiress*, and that Mr. Farley's ambition was touched deeper than his heart. God forgive me for breaking that commandment which says, 'Judge not at all;' I was very wicked."

"Wicked—you wicked, Ellen!"

Again, that look of surprise that seems to beat me back into an inner self, and cover me with shame.

"It is wicked to think ill of another, to seek with our shallow minds to probe to the depths of a friend's heart—that heart always so thoroughly hidden. I ask your pardon."

"Pardon," repeated I, with a forced laugh.

"I have seen your wife now, and I think, cousin, that I love her better than Annie Tackeridge. I am pleased, too, that she likes me a little."

"A great deal, Ellen."

"Do you think so?—well, I shall be proud of so warm-hearted a friend, and she will not find her friendship misplaced in her husband's cousin. Rhoda's is a noble nature,—you should be happy, Philip."

"You have said so before," I answered, testily.

"It is worth repeating," she replied; "she will make you happy, if you study that nature to which I have alluded."

"You have become quite an observer, Ellen."

"It does not require a keen observer to see that that nature is impulsive, apt to resent injuries—real or fancied—and, as I have also said before, Philip, quick to forgive them. Now it is left you to erase all bitter memories, and make her life as calm as it deserves to be; you are the hero of that life; if I know my cousin rightly, no undeserving one."

"A poor hero—a poor hero," I muttered; "I wonder whose life I should have been the hero of had I never known John Tregancy's sister!"

Ellen was silent; I did not repeat the question, or seek to continue the conversation. I felt, as it were, standing on the brink of a precipice, and that a foolish action of my own would dash me from it. I was irritable and discontented. When the business hour came round I left Ellen to the care of my wife, and went away to the world with a load at my heart.

Thoughts of the dialogue that had taken place between me and my cousin interfered with my uncle's business that day and made me miserable. No deep calculations, no burying myself beneath a pile of letters and account-books could drive Ellen from my remembrance, no dreams of my future partnership and coming wealth acted as an antidote to the poison running in my veins.

I did not require wealth—I did not want to be a great man on Mark Lane now—what did I want?

Did I love Ellen Barchard after all? Had I loved her in the secret depths of my heart, when she was a rich man's daughter and far beyond my reach, and yet with that love hidden in my breast sought another for a wife? I hurried from the questions which some accusing spirit seemed hissing in my ears; I had no courage to answer them. One question alone I answered, "What was to be henceforth my plan of action?" To act as an honest man and walk uprightly, to do my duty to my wife, and strive hard to think no more of Ellen, knowing that I was for ever separated from her; to try with all my strength to keep the cruel blight of distrust from falling on my home and killing every hope that flourished there!

To this resolve I came; my honour pointed to none other, and this resolve I sought to keep, and had ever before me, save in those frail moments which better men than I have had and fought against.

Two days before Ellen's departure, one Thursday evening, there came a letter to my cousin from her old friend Annie.

Ellen read it to my wife; it was a warm-hearted, affectionate letter, full of expressions of satisfaction to hear of Ellen's restoration to health, and in the name of their old friendship entreating her to call and see the writer, lest she should think herself entirely forgotten. Ellen was in the best of spirits after the perusal of the letter.

"I fancied Annie Tackeridge was growing tired of me, had forgotten me altogether," said Ellen; "what injustice we may do the best of friends!"

"Shall Philip drive us to Wheatsheaf Villa to-morrow morning, Ellen?" was Rhoda's kind suggestion.

"Oh! no, thank you," said Ellen, in reply, "you are very kind, but——"

"But what?" said Rhoda.

"But I do not wish to take you from your home, to see people whom you dislike."

"How do you know I dislike the Tackeridges, Miss Ellen?" asked Rhoda, with assumed asperity; "have I ever expressed an antipathy to one member of that family?"

"No; but——"

"'But' again!"

"But your meeting with Mrs. Tackeridge at my home was not a pleasant one."

"Very true; perhaps I was not in a pleasant humour. I am of a variable disposition, and do not possess that quiet, lady-like calmness, in which a dear new cousin of mine excels," said Rhoda; "Mrs. Tackeridge will improve on further acquaintance, I am sure. Besides, Ellen, I am curious to see again the future Mrs. Tregancy!"

"Annie Tackeridge will never bear the name of 'Tregancy,'" I observed.

"Oh! you are thinking of your old friends, the Esdens, Philip," said Rhoda, laughing; "forgetting that ladies admire new friends and fresh faces. Yes, Ellen, we will make a morning call on Mrs. Tackeridge and daughter, providing the suggestion meet with your approval."

"I am sure that you are putting yourself out of the way for my sake," said Ellen.

"All I put out of the way is a little jealous feeling, lest Annie Tackeridge should lead you wholly to forget Mrs. Philip Farley."

"She will not do that."

"Then we will go to-morrow."

"And if Mr. Tregancy should meet with Mr. and Mrs. Farley at Wheatsheaf Villa," said I, "what follows then?"

Rhoda turned pale and drew a long breath.

"I had forgotten that," she said, in a low voice.

"Then Ellen Barchard will be peacemaker," answered my cousin.

"No peace ever again between me and my brother," said Rhoda.

"Does your heart say that?"

"The heart of the brother is ruled by a brain that never forgets."

"Shall we defer our visit to Brixton?" asked Ellen.

"Not if I were sure to meet him," Rhoda replied, quickly; "there will be room for him and me, and if his heart is too full of bitterness to bear my presence he must walk into the fresh air, for I shall not. Does it seem strange to you, Ellen, that brother and sister can be thus divided?"

"Very strange."

"But, remember the Tregancys are people of strange passions, and very unforgiving!"

"Can you look me in the face, you unforgiving woman,"

said Ellen, with her full radiant eyes fixed on my wife, "and declare that if John Tregancy offered you his hand, you would turn away and touch it not?"

Rhoda returned Ellen's gaze for a moment, and then lowered her eyes and smiled.

"The storm is passed," she murmured; "I am more happy than I have been in all my life, and less vindictive. No, Ellen, I should take his hand and say, 'Forget the past, brother, we have not been friends in it, let us try to make the future brighter.'"

"And he?"

"Poor fellow—he would forget past and future too!"



## CHAPTER VI.

### PEACEMAKING.

WE drove to Wheatsheaf Villa the next morning. How it reminded me of past days, as we rode round the little carriage-drive, and reined in before the enormous portico. Nearly nine years ago, in the summer time, with a new hard hat on, I sat before that house in Uncle Barchard's chaise. Nothing had changed in or round the gaudy little villa; damask curtains of the old colour were hanging in the windows, the paint was as bright and fresh as ever, the gravel was as red, the same scarlet geraniums seemed blooming in the centre bed, and the name of Tackeridge was flashing from the polished brass-plate on the door, and dazzling my eyes as on the day I coveted my neighbour's goods, and sat contrasting Mr. Tackeridge with my poor old father, who left the world so early. Was it really nine years ago since a little girl stole from that side-wicket and asked me many questions, nine years since Master Esden saluted my uncle at the entrance gates? Yes, I felt that it was nine years since; I was married, and my wife sat beside me; Uncle Barchard's daughter and Annie Tackeridge were no longer children, and Master Esden had become a man of the world.

We were warmly received at Wheatsheaf Villa; Annie flew into Ellen's arms and forgot the rest of the company; Mr. Tackeridge dodged from me to Rhoda and back again con-

tinually shaking hands, and Mrs. Tackeridge, in a state of nervous fluster, was anxious to show in every possible manner her inexpressible delight to see us.

"So kind of Mrs. Farley," began Mrs. Tackeridge, "to think of us! I never expected—I never anticipated—and Mr. Farley, how pale you are looking, ah! this business!—pray be seated, Mrs. Farley—and Ellen, my dear, how pleased I am to see you well again, and restored to the blessings of health. Ah! what is life, its pomps, its riches—its—its pomps—no, not pomps, I have said that before—without that health which only Providence can bestow."

Having got Providence into her address the large lady appeared more comfortable, and sitting down by the side of Rhoda, she begged her to make herself at home and have a glass of wine, or do, or take something which could assure her, Mrs. Tackeridge, how honoured she was by this very friendly call.

Mrs. Tackeridge's attention to my flattered wife did not relax during the whole of her stay; she was *so* charmed, *so* exquisitely delighted!

Mr. Tackeridge, who had had his hat in his hand at our entrance, placed a chair for me and dropped into another.

"Pray do not let me detain you from business, Mr. Tackeridge," said I, after I had exchanged a few words with his wife and daughter, and observed that the latter was not looking so well as the Annie of old.

"Merely off for a stroll, my dear Mr. Farley, no detention at all, thank you," replied Mr. Tackeridge.

"Friday is Mark Lane day," suggested I.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Tackeridge, in a careless manner; "but I am not a buyer to-day. I am rather suspicious of you millers. The flour's kept back, hoarded up somewhere, I know," shutting his left eye, "and that makes trade bad, prices worse, and money very scarce."

"The flour-market, at present, is certainly not in the most flourishing condition."

"The millers are as unsound as the bakers, depend upon it, Sir," said the business man; "the *Gazette* is chock-full of bankrupts, and there are some good names on Mark Lane, which, between you and me," catching me by the button-hole after the old fashion, and whispering softly in my ear, "will not be good names much longer."

"I should not be surprised."

"Some break up through over speculations — some let chances go by them, and get ruined through being over careful. Now, there's Barchard," button-hole and soft whisper again, "he's over careful, I don't know what the devil's come to the man—he'll give no credit to a soul, he is twice as dear as anybody on the Exchange, and he's as suspicious as a fox. I think he fancies everybody is going to fail!"

"One can scarcely be too careful in these times."

"I don't know that—I like a medium—I think a medium preferable. If I were to let all my shops sell at sixpence a loaf, I should be ruined in no time; if I were to put them all up at eightpence, — that's being over careful, — I should not sell a sack amongst the lot; but, Sir," for the third time he was worrying at my button-hole and whispering in my ear, "if I sell half at sevenpence-halfpenny, and a quarter at sixpence-halfpenny, and another quarter at sixpence, I go on swimmingly."

"Yes, I suppose so," I answered, absently, not taking a great degree of interest in the manoeuvres of Mr. Tackeridge.

"I have thirteen shops, Sir; do you know Harp Street, Bethnal Green?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I have the best shop of all in that quarter. Splendid trade there, Sir—nothing in the neighbourhood can stand against it! Why, there's a little crib over the way, a poking little place in the same line, that has changed hands about seven times in the last nine years, and ruined everybody who has gone into it. Can't stand against my 'Down Again!'"

I caught myself scowling at Mr. Tackeridge—the recollection of one man ruined in Harp Street had made my eyebrows lower.

"Don't you feel well, Mr. Farley?"

"Thank you, I am very well," said I, composing my features.

"This has been a trying summer to the constitution, as well as to the baking trade," remarked Tackeridge; "my daughter, Annie, has been ill, and neither I nor Mrs. T. have enjoyed the best of health. I don't think *you* are looking quite up to the mark, mind you, Mr. Farley."

"Possibly, I am not."

"You look care-worn—just as if you had something on your mind."

I winced a little at this.

"Married men and men of business have plenty to occupy the mind," said I, with a forced laugh; "you must find yours deeply occupied sometimes."

"Oh, no—not at all."

"You are a fortunate man, then."

"Business never troubles me—I interfere but little with the working part of it—I see after the money—ha, ha!—occasionally."

Mr. Tackeridge's forehead was not so smooth as it used to be—time had ploughed one or two furrows along it; there were a few lines about the mouth and in the corners of the eyes, too, and his sandy hair had streaks of grey in it that looked suspicious. I had grave doubts concerning Mr. Tackeridge's peace of mind, for all his protestations and volatile manner. The mere surface was smooth enough; what lay deeper?—did Uncle Barchard know?

There was a pause in our dialogue. I looked round. Annie and Ellen had left the room, and Rhoda and Mrs. Tackeridge were talking of John Tregancy.

"And he is a frequent visitor here, Mrs. Tackeridge?" I heard Rhoda ask.

"He is kind enough to call once or twice a-week."

"I can guess the attraction."

"Well, it may be so," said Mrs. Tackeridge, with an affected sigh; "but I should be sorry to lose my child—my only one, too! for the poor consolation of knowing that she had made an eligible match."

"Does Annie—I mean Miss Tackeridge—favour Mr. Tregancy's addresses, may I ask?"

"Well—ahem—we can hardly call them addresses yet, Mrs. Farley. There has been nothing particular—that is, strikingly particular on the part of Mr. Tregancy to call for an explanation, and Annie is rather cold to him at times—I may say ridiculously reserved."

"Then she does not like him?"

"I don't say that," Mrs. Tackeridge said, quickly; "Mr. Tregancy is too much of a gentleman for any one to dislike, I think. He is a quiet, good-tempered, amiable young man, and I am as attached to him as if he was my own son."

"Mr. Tregancy must have altered very much."

"Dear me! I had forgotten the little difference existing. Ah! how happy should I be to see that settled! Really now," looking at her watch, "this is about his time. If he should



only call this morning, perhaps my mediation might induce brother and sister to shake hands again."

"Is it likely that Mr. Tregancy will call this morning?" asked Rhoda, turning pale.

"He sometimes favours us with a morning visit," replied Mrs. Tackeridge, "in order to propose some nice little excursion or other, for he is a very agreeable young man!"

"You have a large garden, Mrs. Tackeridge," said Rhoda.

"Yes, and—why goodness gracious," going to the window, "there's Annie and Miss Barchard, and Annie without a mite of covering on her head!"

Mrs. Tackeridge rose to remonstrate with her daughter, and Rhoda having expressed a wish to see the garden—was she fearful lest John Tregancy should be ushered into that room, or was she anxious to prolong her stay?—the ladies descended the steps which led from the French window. Not caring for an extension of my *tête-a-tête* with Mr. Tackeridge, whose subject was still business, I proposed following the ladies, and Mr. Tackeridge, discoursing on the quality of wheat, led the way to the air and sunshine.

Once in the garden, and the garden-walks being narrow and winding, I contrived to escape from Mr. Tackeridge and get a few paces in advance. After a word or two with Mrs. Tackeridge and Rhoda on floriculture in general, I joined my cousin Ellen and her old friend Annie.

"Your pardon for the intrusion, ladies; but Mrs. Tackeridge appears to think it probable that Mr. Tregancy may call this morning, Ellen."

"Well?" with an inquiring look.

"I think it would save Rhoda considerable embarrassment and pain if we retired at once. Miss Tackeridge, I am sure, will excuse us?"

"Miss Tackeridge will do nothing of the kind—will you, Annie?" said Ellen; "I have made up my mind for a long morning visit."

"But, if we meet him here?"

"Then we must persuade brother and sister to kiss and be friends."

"And how much happier would brother and sister be afterwards?" I asked in a low voice.

"Do you not desire a reconciliation, then?" inquired Ellen.

"No," I answered; "better this division than the old strifes between them."

"Mr. Farley does not exhibit much affection for Mr. Tregancy," said Ellen, to Miss Tackeridge; "who shall say men are not jealous of each other as well as women, Annie?"

"I am not jealous of John Tregancy, Ellen,—I have no reason to be jealous."

"You are jealous of John Tregancy's power to win back a sister's love."

"Not jealous—fearful."

Annie Tackeridge, who had listened with interest, said—

"It does not strike me that Mr. Tregancy is a gentleman of whom to be jealous, or fearful."

"I am not fearful of Mr. Tregancy on my own account, Miss Tackeridge, but on Mrs. Farley's."

"Is Annie going to take up the cudgels in defence of her cavalier?" said Ellen, with a laugh.

Annie, with a heightened colour, answered—

"No cavalier of mine, Ellen."

"Then he comes very often here to see—your mother."

"I do not know whom he comes to see," said Annie; "I hope not Annie Tackeridge."

"Do you not think Mr. Tregancy a very nice young man?" persisted Ellen; "there, confess, Annie, and never mind Mr. Farley; he is a married man, and Mr. Tregancy's brother-in-law."

"I hear nothing but the name of Mr. Tregancy from father, mother, friends," said Annie, with a little frown; "I do not wish to hear his name so often, or so often coupled with his praises; and," in a lower tone of voice, "I hope he does not come to Wheatsheaf Villa to see me, for he is the last man I should think of marrying."

"Ah! but when the mother is on the side of the enemy——"

"No," said Annie, with a touch of her old firmness.

"Truly?"

"Truly."

"Why, I remember when the mother was against——"

"Hush!" with a glance at me; "if my mother was against any one I loved and did not approve of him or his prospects, I should resign him for her sake."

"But for his sake—the resigned one?" said Ellen.

"I would be firm enough, obstinate enough," with a smile, "to die an old maid!"

The conversation becoming too confidential, I drew back,

and feigned to be interested in a fine standard rose on my left hand. It struck me that Annie Tackeridge had wished me to hear her last assertion—had hoped, perhaps, that I was still Frank Esden's friend, and that Frank might listen to the story from my lips some day, and learn a lesson from it. I felt that Frank would have been happier, and steadier, had he heard her that morning; had he heard her years ago—before they quarrelled and went their separate ways.

Still reflecting, when a smart servant maid came tripping down the garden. Mrs. Tackeridge's voice addressing her, woke me from my reverie over the rose tree.

"What is it, Fanny?"

"Mr. Tregancy, if you please, Ma'am."

"Oh! dear me," ejaculated Mrs. Tackeridge, with a glance at the pale countenance of my wife.

Rhoda, murmuring a few words of apology, abandoned Mrs. Tackeridge and came flying towards me.

"Philip, dear, what shall we do?" she asked.

"What is there left to do, but face him?"

"Do you wish me to go away without seeing him, Philip?"

"Do *you* wish to go?"

"If we are to be still divided it is better policy."

"If to be friends with your brother will make you happier, I will do my best to bring about a reconciliation, Rhoda," said I; "to-day may be the turning point in my life for good or evil—and our future peace may rest upon the step we take."

"We will not take it rashly, Philip," she answered, "it requires consideration. I have never been happy with him, and his affection for me has long since died away,—but remember that he is my brother, the only tie which reminds me of an early home!"

I hesitated. John Tregancy might still be opposed to his sister and her husband, and I knew too well how his contumelious manner would affect one so sensitive as Rhoda.

Mrs. Tackeridge was embarrassed; she looked at Rhoda again, but Rhoda was seeking counsel of me—she looked towards Ellen Barchard, and Ellen, by a glance, decided it.

"Fanny, will you ask Mr. Tregancy to be kind enough to step this way," said Mrs. Tackeridge; then turning to my wife, "Mrs. Farley, I hope I am not doing wrong, but if I can be the means of bringing you together, it will perhaps relieve your mind."

"Thank you," said Rhoda, her hands fastening on my arm;

"if Mr. Tregancy offer to forget the past I am his sister and will forget also. If his pride be too high, he will see no humility in me."

"Here he comes," said Ellen.

Through the glass-doors of the room which we had recently quitted came John Tregancy. Ignorant of the friends or enemies who were waiting to receive him in Mr. Tackeridge's pleasant garden, he came lightly down the steps. When he was halfway towards us he raised his head, looked, changed colour, stopped—then came on again.

Ellen, anxious to play the part of peacemaker, conscious, perhaps, that Mrs. Tackeridge would do it less gracefully, or that I might forestall her and mar all, broke away from Annie's arm and advanced to meet him.

Mr. Tregancy's hat was raised and I saw Black Jack change colour a second time as she extended her hand towards him.

"Miss Barchard," said he, "this is an unexpected pleasure."

"I trust I may say that I have another unexpected pleasure in store for you, Mr. Tregancy," replied Ellen.

Tregancy looked from me to Rhoda, shifted his dark eyes to Annie, glanced at Mr. and Mrs. Tackeridge, met the full gaze of Ellen, bit his lip, and stood perplexed.

John Tregancy was a good hater, one who in his heart never forgave; I believe had he met Rhoda and me in any other place, had he been less surrounded by those in whose favour he was trying to ingratiate himself, had his new love, Annie, been away, or had his old love, Ellen, not stood before him seeking to read his determination on his dark features, he would have given way to one of his outbursts of passion and refused that reconciliation which every one, save myself, seemed eager to bring round. Every one but myself, on whom a foreboding rested that ill would come of it.

"Mr. Tregancy parted in anger with an only sister, I have heard," began Ellen, earnestly; "sister and brother are holy names, and express so much affection, that for one to stand against the other, and repel the other with angry word and look, is most unnatural. A chance meeting has brought together that brother and sister—if they part as they have met, without a word or sign, it will speak ill for both their hearts!"

"Miss Barchard flatters me by her interest in a family dispute," said Tregancy, bowing, "I am—" here he swallowed something very indigestible, "quite willing to show my best friends that as I look upon the past as irrevocable, so I am not childish and absurd enough to bear enmity for what took place in it. Still I am curious to hear Mrs. Farley's opinion on the subject—my sister was not lacking in a will of her own, or an expression of it once upon a time," his old brotherly curl of the lip, "and before I make a pretty stage-scene by falling on my knees at everybody's feet, I am desirous of learning Mrs. Farley's wishes."

Rhoda left my side, and went with both hands extended to her brother.

"John, we have had many quarrels together in our lives, shall we witness here the end of all disputes, and be brother and sister,—*true* brother and sister—from this day forth? It only requires a little of my brother's love to make me very happy—happy as heart can wish for!"

John Tregancy took her hands in his and received her kiss of peace.

"Henceforth I will leave Mrs. Farley's tempers to her husband's care," laughed he.

"Ha, ha!" chuckled Mr. Tackeridge, "a smart joke that. Just like Mr. Tregancy, ha! ha! ha!"

"And that husband," said Rhoda, retaining her brother's hands and drawing him towards me, "must be my brother's friend again—you were friends once, recollect."

"Friends once," echoed Tregancy, "a long while ago, at school, eh, Mr. Farley?"

"We were rivals there."

"We have been always rivals, snatching at each other's prizes as we journeyed on in life."

"Was I a prize for which you strove, John?" asked Rhoda.

"I strove to keep you from becoming Mr. Farley's reward of merit, at least," said Tregancy, with a laugh, "but Phil Farley stole a march upon me. Well, it was a fair fight, and though I was savage enough when I came home on my birthday morning, still I should have done the same in Farley's place and—there's an end of it!"

He offered his hand, and I placed mine within it. He grasped my hand hard, but it was with no friendly pressure; it resembled more an attempt to give a little pain. It re-

minded me of a schoolboy trick of his — the crushing of delicate and juvenile fingers in his iron palm, an operation which invariably concluded with a burst of indignant tears.

"There's an end of it," repeated Tregancy, "and now," passing his arm through mine as we advanced towards the house, "let the ladies and Mr. Tackeridge lead the way, and tell me how you are getting on, Farley, what you are doing, or what you intend to do?"

"Getting on very well, thank you, Tregancy," said I, "and intend to get on better; I think of becoming my Uncle Bar-chard's partner—but you have heard that, I presume."

"From whom was I to receive the important news?"

"Frank Esden is aware of it."

"Oh! I have not seen Frank Esden lately. He's a good sort of fellow, but his moral fits and starts never agreed with me—besides I am not very firm in my friendships—never was, you know."

"A lover of change still?"

"Yes."

"Given up legerdemain, I suppose?"

"Ha! ha!—Vauclose the professor, you mean—I did not understand your satirical allusion at first. Yes, I have abandoned that study, and so has the wizard. He has taken to the stage again—flourishing somewhere in the provinces as a brand new American tragedian."

"And 'has John Tregancy given up all his old friends and habits?—and does he for the sake of change think of playing Benedict?"

Tregancy frowned.

"Like an old friend of mine with whom I thought I was at enmity for ever, I am very sly on that point, and keep my intentions in the shade."

Tregancy and I were rather sharp on each other, for all our renewed intimacy. When I looked him in the face I detected in the dark eyes a flashing, which was not new to me. But I was not afraid of him or his taunts. My temper had grown hardened during the last few weeks, and that day in particular I felt myself his match.

"Are you sure Mrs. Tackeridge helps to keep those intentions in the shade too, Tregancy?"

"Oh, that old magpie!" said he; "well, perhaps not. If the daughter was as gracious as the mother, I should take wing and away. But her very coldness spurs me on—she

does not want me here, and her parents do—opposition sets my blood boiling and so I call here *rather* often.”

“Flattering to Annie Tackeridge.”

“Oh ! I like the girl—I always did for that matter, and no one shall have her but myself if I can help it, unless—but here am I making you my confidant, you, whom I cursed heartily the last time I saw you. Do you know I took an oath that morning to be even with you one day ? ”

“I do not doubt it.”

“Ah ! you know my character by this time—I must confess there’s many a greater fool than the gentleman with whom I have the honour to be walking arm-in-arm.”

“Thank you for the compliment.”

“Don’t mention it, I beg. And to speak candidly, I do not despair of being even with you yet.”

“Never despair,” said I, quietly.

“It is a bad practice to put your enemy on his guard, but that’s a habit of mine, and makes it fairer fighting,” said he ; “I hope I do not frighten you ? ”

“Not at all.”

“Once more down this walk whilst the ladies are settling in their seats and congratulating Miss Barchard on the excellent style in which she has played the part of peace-maker.”

We wheeled round again.

“Miss Barchard,” continued he, “is staying here, I presume ? ”

“No ; she is a visitor at my house.”

“That’s news to me.”

For an instant he passed his hand across his face.

“And how do Mrs. Farley and Miss Barchard agree ? ”

“Oh ! they are the best of friends.”

“May I ask another question ? ”

“Certainly.”

“It is a rude one.”

“Say on—I can excuse it.”

“How do Mr. and Mrs. Farley agree ? ”

“They are the best of friends too.”

“Ah ! then Mrs. Farley has it all her own way—nothing to cavil at—nothing of which to be jealous.”

“You think her of a jealous disposition, Tregancy ? ”

“I never thought her right in her head, myself,” replied he ; “that was one of my great objections to her becoming your

wife. Jealous, man!—wait till the train is once lighted, there will be no stopping it till the mine explodes.”

“You draw a promising picture of my future felicity.”

“You married for a fortune, not for felicity, Farley,” said he; “he is a lucky fellow who gets the last into the bargain when he aimed only at the first.”

“Your sister gave me credit for a less sordid motive when I sought her hand,” I answered, “but John Tregancy is unbelieving.”

“John Tregancy does not believe in impossibilities.”

“I do not understand you.”

“Let me suppose a case—I believe,” gripping my arm, “that it is impossible for a young man to fall in love with a woman older than himself, a woman whose personal attractions are few too, when that young man has a cousin whom he sees very often, a cousin, young, beautiful and amiable.”

He scorched me with a hot iron—I felt the blood burning in my face and I knew that he saw the guilty witness there. Still I rallied.

“If you speak of Miss Barchard, Tregancy, she was almost a sister to me, and a man seldom falls in love with one whom he has been brought up to regard in the light of a near and dear relation.”

“Not a man, perhaps—but you are not yet one and twenty.”

“Ah! you plume yourself on the few months’ start you have got of me,” said I, “and so talk like a man of the world. Besides, it is not fair for you to judge, Tregancy; you saw my cousin Ellen with partial eyes, and magnified her beauty and her goodness—perhaps not her goodness—you cannot magnify that—till you thought all who looked upon her loved her.”

Tregancy’s turn to colour.

“So she has told you everything. Well, well, well, I was foolish to expose myself to the pain of defeat, but I never was a prudent man when the mood seized me. Besides, I was afraid of your opportunities of cutting me out, and so struck at the iron before it was hot enough. Too great a hurry—too great a hurry!”

“You were mistaken in my motives, you see, Tregancy.”

“As I was unfortunate in my pursuit—eh? Well, I have made up my mind, Farley—I confide in your honour, brother-in-law!—to win Annie Tackeridge for a wife, although I have



an idea of a foolish love affair of hers standing in my way. I will be sure and certain this time before I place my heart and fortune," how he sneered at the words! "at her feet."

"So, then, you are really attached to Miss Tackeridge?"

"Yes—I say yes—who doubts it?"

"I am glad to hear that the wild oats are sown at last, and John Tregancy thinks of sobering down."

"I shall never sober down—it's not in my nature, but I shall marry, if" with a laugh, "it's only for the sake of making somebody miserable. I am partial to victims—ask Rhoda what a life I led her."

"You are a strange man."

"I prefer being singular, people think a great deal more of you. And as for marrying—I don't much care who is to be the happy bride, or how I lose *caste* by wedding a baker's daughter."

"You are ungenerous."

"My sister married a baker's son, you know—all in the bread and flour line, the Tregancys."

I let him sneer on; his taunts did not deeply affect me, and I could laugh at his vain attempts to wound my pride, knowing that I had won the game at which he had tried hard to thwart me. More, I kept back one or two stinging replies that might have disturbed John Tregancy's equanimity, for the sake of his sister, whose heart was light now her brother had shaken hands and cried "Peace." Let it never be said that I sought to create fresh divisions on the first day of the reunion.

Tregancy's manner was no index to his thoughts or real intentions—he was a mystery at school, he would remain so to the last day of his life. If I had been sufficiently interested, I could have found food for speculation in his half-confidence, varied by his sudden acrimonious attacks, in his exhibition of friendship, hatred and indifference in one breath, but the day before Ellen's departure my mind was too preoccupied and busy.

When we rejoined the rest of the party, Tregancy took a seat by the side of Miss Tackeridge and paid no more attention to his sister. Annie Tackeridge did not appear complimented by his notice, was at times rather embarrassed at meeting Rhoda's eyes—sad, earnest eyes they were too—fixed upon Mr. Tregancy and herself.

Brother and sister parted the best of friends, and the brothers-in-law shook hands affectionately. Annie Tackeridge and Ellen

made one or two promises for the ensuing week, and John Tregancy thanked his sister for an invitation to dinner that day, and half promised to accept it.

"I hope that he will come," said Rhoda, as we drove away ; "something tells me we shall always be good friends now, never quarrel again, or be cast adrift on the waters of trouble ; I hope that he will come."

Poor Rhoda ! did she know what she was hoping for in the warmth of her heart ? Hope is a mirage. Well for us all that Hope is often illusive, although Hope drawn by Fancy has the face of an angel.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### PEACE BREAKING

REALITY followed Hope for once, and John Tregancy came to dinner. No prodigal son returning to the home he had left desolate, or the hearts he had broken, could have been made more welcome.

Everything was forgotten—all the remembrances that had sunk so deeply were hidden ; John Tregancy was a hero. Rhoda was a woman whose manner at times was inclined to verge on the extravagant, and the earlier portion of that evening witnessed small bounds to her delight ; even her brother, pretty well acquainted with her idiosyncracies, was surprised at the warmth of his reception. Flattered by that reception, he left off being satirical and rude—I believed at first that he had come for no other purpose—and was the best of company, and the most attentive of gentlemen to his sister and my cousin.

After dinner there followed a musical evening, and as I knew little of opera *morceaux*, and cared less about them, I left the three to discuss the merits of their favourite composers, and sat isolated in the background ; and, by the way, few things isolate a man more than for the company in which he is placed to discourse on a subject of which he knows nothing. I sat, half-listening, half-observing ; I was never a good talker, was always content to sit still and hear others, watch the game of life over the shoulders of the players, and that night, in parti-

cular, I found it somewhat a relief to be excluded from my share in the general conversation.

Music was so great a passion with my wife, that for the time whilst the spell lasted she could forget everything that was passing in the world at her side. Music had been her refuge and her consolation in days when she was less happy, and she still clung to it, and valued it at more than its just worth. Therefore, it was natural that Ellen should be the first to notice my abstraction, and endeavour to rouse me from it by coming towards me, and sitting by my side.

Rhoda was playing a lengthy, complicated piece of Mendelssohn's, and her brother sat near her, observing everything, glancing at the music, at Rhoda, at her long fingers rapidly flitting over the keys, watching, with his restless black eyes, each movement of Ellen, after she had changed her place, and was sitting near me.

"Rhoda is an accomplished pianist, Philip," she remarked.

"I believe she is. I am no judge myself."

"We have been quite selfish the last two hours, cousin, in discussing the subject of music—nothing but music, and you care little concerning it."

"I have not made a study of it, Ellen—still I am fond of it—fond of listening to it."

"I wonder that you do not take lessons of Rhoda—you have plenty of time on your hands, cousin."

"A miller at the pianoforte, Ellen. What would they say on Mark Lane?"

She laughed. What a soft musical laugh she had. Its tones always sank to my heart, and vibrated there. How dangerous it was to sit by her side, and how glad I ought to have been that she was going away to-morrow!

"I have done one action for which I have a right to commend myself during my stay here, Philip," said Ellen, "I have made Rhoda and her brother friends again."

"You cannot be sure that that action is deserving commendation, being ignorant what may follow it some day."

"How gloomy you have got lately, Philip. You are full of forebodings."

"I know John Tregancy."

"And do you think that I have no knowledge of his character?" she asked, in a strange suppressed voice.

"I am certain you have not."

"I know him too well—too well ! Better than ever you will, Philip ; better than he does himself."

I started ; the words were not uttered in her usual tone of voice ; I looked full in her face, and that face was, for one fleeting moment, scarlet. I felt a dagger strike me.

"Ellen !" said I.

"Hush ! I am very foolish to pretend to be a judge of character," she said ; "but your firm assertion vexed me, and I could not refrain from a slight demonstration of temper. You see your cousin is not so amiable as you imagined her to be."

I did not answer ; I was thinking, wandering in dream-land. What did it all mean ? was there a reason for that agitation which had not yet subsided ? What was John Tregancy to my cousin ? He had proposed a year ago, and been rejected, therefore it was not love ; no, no, it could not be love for that strange enigma of a man who was still sitting opposite and watching us.

The music suddenly ceased, Rhoda had shifted her position on the music-stool, and was looking in our direction. Her quick eyes had detected Ellen's unusual manner also, for she said—

"What is the matter ?"

"With whom ?" asked Ellen.

"With you—with Philip ?"

"Very little the matter, Mrs. Farley," said Ellen, recovering herself, "your husband has just flatly contradicted a lady-cousin of his ; but she has got over the affront, and forgiven him."

"It is well Mr. Farley is a married man, Miss Barchard," said Tregancy, spitefully, "or that little tiff would have looked suspicious."

Rhoda was curious and doubtful, as well she might be ; but she forced a smile and said—

"You have got tired of my symphony, so I will not finish it. Now, John, I hope you remember some of your old pieces."

Tregancy exchanged places with my wife, and Ellen crossed back to her seat by Rhoda's side. Tregancy played a short brilliant piece at double-quick time ; he was evidently anxious to get to the end of it, and then he was pressing my cousin for a song.

When the evening was late, by some chance, possibly by a stroke of ingenuity, Tregancy had crossed to Ellen's side, and left his sister to the attention of her husband. Ellen and Tregancy were conversing on a commonplace topic enough, but it had become my turn to watch. I saw how silently—almost

breathlessly.—Tregancy listened to her words, with what respect he addressed her, how fervently he glanced at her when she was looking in another direction, or speaking a word or two across to Rhoda ; and I thought if they were, after all, to be married, if Ellen had really loved him at the time of his rejection, and would not answer “No,” again, if he were to whisper, for the second time, a story of the heart ! I thought, too, how awful it would be, and what a life of sorrow and wrong she would choose for herself ; and thinking thus my brain began to burn, and a new-born hatred of Tregancy to add its fuel to the flame within my breast.

“Is Ellen Barchard to win my brother John from the pretty daughter of Mr. Tackeridge, Philip ? ”

“God forbid ! ”

“She might make him steady—with her at his side he might begin a new life.”

“Always a dreamer, Rhoda,” said I, testily.

“John has altered lately. I do not give up all hope of him now, Philip ;—oh ! if Ellen were but to love him, and marry him ! ”

“All this supposition on the strength of yonder trifling conversation,” said I ; “rest assured, Rhoda, that Ellen Barchard will never marry John Tregancy. I would not stand by and see her sacrificed.”

“You are very interested in your cousin,” said Rhoda, sharply ; “it is well that I have promised not to be jealous again, for you are not slow to give me cause.”

“Jealous, because I am careful of my cousin ? ”

“She can take care of herself.”

“I look upon her as under my charge whilst she remains beneath the shelter of this roof.”

“You talk as if Ellen was a child.”

“She is a child in ignorance of the world, and too pure in thought to guess the evil which is in it.”

“Pray spare me this constant repetition of her praises.”

“Is she unworthy praise ? ”

“No ! but praise from the lips of the husband is not grateful to the ears of the wife.”

Rhoda moved her chair nearer to the table, and taking up a book that lay thereon, feigned to be immediately interested in its contents. It was a poor effort at composure, for I saw her hands shake as they held the volume. At any other time I might have reasoned with her, sought to

calm that slight exhibition of a temper over which she exercised—had ever exercised—but little control ; but that night I was scarcely myself. Cold, phlegmatic as I was by nature, there was a limit which I could pass, and be no longer the man of calculation and reflection, and I had thrust the barrier aside that night.

Rhoda had irritated me ; the manner of Tregancy towards Ellen Barchard—Ellen whom I did not love, had never loved, who I was trying hard to believe had never occupied a serious thought of mine—irritated me still more, and the strange unaccountable manner of Ellen herself added no light weight to the burden of perplexity.

Rhoda, left to her own thoughts, did not cool down ; she had expected me to follow her to the table and soothe her by a few words of endearment, such as children are soothed by when the evil fit is on them, and sullen as a child myself, I retained my seat and watched Ellen and Tregancy.

Watching them, I forgot my wife, and was but recalled to her existence by the closing of the drawing-room door. Ellen looked up.

“ Where is Mrs. Farley ? ”

“ I do not know—I think that she has just left the room.”

“ What, Farley, have you been asleep ? ” asked Tregancy.

“ No, wide awake, I assure you ! ” answered I ; “ shall I go and see for Mrs. Farley ? ”

“ No, no,” said Ellen, quickly, “ I am going ; I wish to speak to her—excuse me.”

Ellen darted from the room, leaving me and Black Jack *lête-a-tête*.

The conversation which succeeded the departure of the ladies was not brilliant or well-sustained. Tregancy, for once in his life, was meditative, despite his attempt to be ironical and epigrammatic. I knew that he was thinking of Ellen, and careless of what he was saying to me, and I saw more that night of Tregancy’s heart than I had ever seen before, than I ever beheld afterwards.

Five minutes—ten minutes passed, and neither Mrs. Farley nor Ellen made her reappearance.

“ I say, Farley,” asked Tregancy, rousing himself from that reverie which he thought he had concealed with his small talk, “ have the ladies deserted us ? ”

“ They may be strolling round the garden.”

"What, by moonlight?" observed he; "how very romantic!"

The drawing-room extended the whole length of the house, and there was a window at the back which looked upon the garden. Tregancy drew the blind aside and peered out.

"I see no one."

"They will return presently. You seem anxious for the ladies, friend—I remember the time when Tregancy would have been thankful to see the door close on the skirt of the last fair one."

"True. And as for the fair ones, why I hope they will not return till I have smoked out my cigar on this delightful balcony."

He drew a cigar-case from his pocket.

"Can I offer you a weed—a choice one?"

"No, thank you. I do not smoke."

"Rhoda cannot blame me if I sit here," taking his place on the low stone-work that stretched before the window, "for polluting her window-curtains with the flavour of my Havannah, can she?"

"Certainly not."

A fusee flickered for a moment, and was applied to the end of a cigar—then John Tregancy was taking his ease in the moonlight.

"I cannot ask you to join me, Farley, for there's hardly room for two to be comfortable, unless they are of the Romeo and Juliet species, and Juliet has no objection to Romeo's arm round her waist."

"Don't mention it, I am not partial to night-air, and am perfectly content to sit here till you have finished your cigar."

"I wonder you do not have a flight of steps from this window to the garden, in order to match the flight on the opposite side."

"It would be more uniform."

A long pause, then Tregancy spoke again.

"I suppose you drop into the garden sometimes, Farley. Do you remember how we used to drop over the wall at school?—this is not more than eight feet to the ground, I take it."

"Scarcely that."

Another long pause. I was too ill-tempered to help to sustain the conversation, so Tregancy had all the work to himself.

"What a beautiful moonlight night it is!"

"Yes."

"I hope the breeze does not interfere with Rhoda's wax candles, inside there."

"No, I think not."

A long pause—so long, accompanied by so perfect a stillness, that I began to raise my head and look more keenly round me. In the position I had assumed the window-curtains screened Tregancy from me, but becoming suspicious of his movements, I rose, walked to the table, and took up the book which Rhoda had lately set aside.

"Have you read Dickens's last?"

No answer—Tregancy was gone! I ran to the open window and looked over the balcony into the moonlit garden. From my post of observation I could trace the winding of the paths towards the river, and my jealous eyes saw rapidly advancing up the centre-walk the graceful figure of my cousin Ellen; I glanced round for Tregancy, and I saw him emerge from the shadow of some lilac shrubs, and come hurrying over lawn and flower-bed in his eagerness to intercept her. I ground my teeth with rage, I clenched my fist and beat it on the stone-work. What did all this dumb-show and masking presage?

Ellen was fleet of foot, but Tregancy's fear of losing her added wings to his pursuit, and his hand was on her arm as she reached the first step leading to the parlour.

"Mr. Tregancy," said Ellen, haughtily, "I do not understand this conduct."

"Pardon me, but you ran," said he, "and—and—I wished to speak a few words to you."

"Surely Mr. Tregancy might have waited till I had joined him in the drawing-room."

I was listening like a coward—I had no power to draw back or advance, and the figures in the garden were both too disturbed to think of eaves-droppers.

"No, I could not have waited—Ellen, Miss Barchard, will you hear me for one moment?" he cried.

"Not here."

"I would not seek it here, were there another place to ask you but one question. You shall not go," he added fiercely, "till you have answered it."

"Well, Sir."

Ellen made no second effort to fly. She stood looking at his agitated face—a ghastly face it was in the moonlight—and waited calmly for the question.



"Twelve months ago I told you that you were my only hope—that only you could make me a better, steadier man. You turned from me, saying that I was too great a slave to my own passions to be ruled by Ellen Barchard, or any living being—you refused me!"

"This is recapitulation—I am waiting for Mr. Tregancy's question," said Ellen, in a voice less firm.

"The year has not seen my love die away; it is more strong, more violent, it consumes me like a fire. Will you, Ellen, have mercy?"

"I thought this painful subject had been concluded for ever."

"Will you say nothing in reply?"

"Nothing, save that I hope Mr. Tregancy does not require me to utter my fixed determination again. A determination," she added, after a struggle with her voice, "to marry no man who cannot control himself and his passions, no man who is dishonourable enough to talk of love to one girl, whilst in pursuit of another."

"If you mean Miss Tackeridge, I——"

"I trust Mr. Tregancy will be content with my answer. I have no other—I never shall have—to offer *him*. Suffer me to pass, Sir."

Tregancy drew back, and I drew back also in the shadow of the curtains. Ellen went up the steps into the house, and Tregancy turned on his heel and marched quickly down the gravel path, towards the river. I entered the room—the empty, deserted drawing-room, and sat down with my head between my hot hands, to meditate over all that passed.

"She does not love him; how cold and scornful she was—how he shrank back like an evil spirit before an angel of light; how dare he, Tregancy, insult my cousin, in my own house?"

Tregancy came clambering over the balcony again.

"No ladies yet, Phil Farley. Why, where the deuce have they got to?"

I started. Had he been playing a part, feigning emotion, and the agony of a misplaced love to Ellen, or was he looking through the curtains with a mask on? A second glance assured me that he was playing a part to me; and acting so well as only John Tregancy could act, that had I not possessed the key to the riddle, I might have been easily deceived. But I felt that the gaiety of tone was too laboured, and the voice too closely resembled that which I had heard outside in the garden. I

could have pitied him, had I been less jealous of his attempt to win the heart of Ellen.

"Have you been for a stroll round the grounds?" I asked.

"Yes, taken romantic," he replied; "I see the Thames wows the flowers at the end of your garden, Farley. Quite an elysium for the loving couple who own the estate."

"It is a pretty place," said I, not heeding the scoff.

"I think I will come in now my cigar's burnt out," said he, entering the room and yawning. "Heigho! this is slow work after the supper-rooms in the Haymarket, eh? Do you remember that night, Farley, when we carried away Frank Esden? How indignant his brother was lest we should lead the poor sheep from the beaten track, ha, ha! Pass that decanter of sherry."

He drank a couple of glasses of wine in succession, leaned back in his chair and began to hum a song. Whilst thus occupied, the door opened, and Rhoda reappeared.

"Oh! here you are," said Tregancy, looking round; "I don't call this etiquette, Mrs. Farley, unless it's Hammersmith etiquette, and peculiar to the locality."

"You will excuse me, John, I hope."

"Oh! brothers do not look for ceremony. Where is Miss Barchard?"

"She complains of a headache—I am afraid that she will not return to-night."

"Nasty things, headaches," said Tregancy, filling his glass for the third time; "you used to be troubled with headaches a great deal, Rhoda. Have you got over that weakness?"

"I thought I had, but to-night has undeceived me."

"What! another headache? Oh! this Hammersmith ought to be indicted for a nuisance—it's giving everybody headaches!"

"Ellen did not complain of illness before I left the room," said Rhoda. "It is very strange."

"Ladies are strange beings," commented her brother, "they puzzle the best of us—puzzle each other, and that is a marvel."

Tregancy rose.

"Going, John?" exclaimed Rhoda.

"Past nine," looking at his watch, "and time was made for slaves."

"Then Mr. Tregancy can afford to laugh at time," said Rhoda.

"No."

"He is no slave to it."

"I have been a slave to a shadow," he cried, with a wild fire in his eye, "and the shadow has vanished into air, and yet not left me free!"

"John!" said Rhoda, alarmed.

"That's a little piece of acting I learned of Mr. Vauclose," said Tregancy, with a short laugh; "don't you think it is well done?"

"I thought that you were in earnest."

"I am never in earnest, Mrs. Farley," said he, "always acting, always thinking of something foreign to the present subject, always brooding on real injuries, or making false ones out of fancy. Vauclose tells me that I am half mad sometimes. What do you think, Rhoda?"

"I think this Vauclose—this man with whom I hoped you had long ago dissolved connection—takes strange liberties."

"The Tregancys, some generations back, used to have a trouble to keep their brains in the right place, I have heard my father say," said he; "I hope I shan't, for I hate strait jackets. So you object to my dear and valued friend, Vauclose?"

"Yes."

"His name is Effingham now—Effingham, from the United States. Surely, that name will make you admire him more?" Rhoda shook her head.

"He tells me that I should make a wonderful sensation on the stage. I dare say I shall try it, when I run short of money—if it be only for the novelty of the thing. What part do you think would suit me, Farley?"

"I do not know—I am not well up in stage matters," I answered, carelessly.

"Macbeth, now, or Iago? Ah! that's a character I might shine in; Iago, to Vauclose's Othello. He plays Othello infernally bad, though, and would gag all my crack speeches. But time, time—how I am prating here."

"When shall we see you again, John?"

"Sooner than you wish, perhaps; for I have nothing to do, and, as the phrase runs, nobody to help me."

"I am afraid you spend the greater part of your time at Wheatsheaf Villa, Brixton," said Rhoda; "the attraction is strong there, I am sure."

"Are you quite sure, madam?" he replied. "Well, well! one must marry some day, and sober down. Just imagine

Black Jack a model husband, with no latch-key in his pocket, and no loose thoughts in his head. Black Jack with a wife at his elbow, and a baby on his knee. There's a picture ! Good-night, Rhoda."

"You will come soon."

"To be sure I will."

When he had departed, and Rhoda and I were sitting together in the drawing-room, my wife said—

"What high spirits John was in to-night."

"Forced—forced !"

Rhoda's eyes flashed.

"Forced or not, I cannot say the same for Mr. Farley's. He was never more strange, more dull, or more insulting to my brother."

"Insulting !—I would not insult a dog under my own roof."

"Insulting by your silence—by your monosyllables."

"You mistake, Rhoda."

"Did you make one effort to show that he was welcome ?"

"He was not welcome to me—he is my enemy, and yours. I feel convinced that you and I will have proof of that shortly."

"Philip, you are not yourself to-night," said she, more gently ; "something has disturbed you—you do not mean what you say."

"I do," I answered, "but I hope that I may be wrong."

"You will be."

"Have you seen Ellen ?"

"Yes," replied Rhoda, "she was ill, and very agitated—what does that mean too ? I am sure *you* know !"

"Did Ellen offer no explanation ?"

"She will tell me all to-morrow."

"Let us wait till to-morrow then, Rhoda."

"No !" with an impatient stamp of her foot.

"Do you require an explanation from *me*, Mrs. Farley ?" I asked, with some surprise.

"From whom have I a greater right to ask it ?"

"It is Ellen's secret."

"It is yours also—it is a secret between you both, and I must know it."

"You mistake, it is no secret of mine, neither does it affect me."

"Will you tell me ?" said she, snatching up a piece of music and rolling it tightly in her hands.

"If you wish it."

"I am waiting very patiently."

"The secret—if it be a secret—lies between my cousin and your brother. I have no share in it, Mrs. Farley."

She gave a sigh of relief, as though a heavy weight was taken off her heart.

"You said that I was reserved, even insulting, to your brother to-night," I continued; "no wonder, Rhoda, for I have had a struggle with myself to refrain from demanding *my* explanation, too. Your brother proposed to my cousin a year ago; he had his answer then, and it should have been sufficient for a gentleman."

"Go on," said Rhoda, impatiently.

"To-night, in your absence, seeing Ellen in the garden, where she had gone in search of you—he followed, stayed her progress and, holding her by the wrist, compelled her to be again insulted with the offer of his love."

"And she refused him?"

"Yes."

"Where were you?"

"Listening at that window."

"Heroic!"

"Missing your brother suddenly, I had drawn the curtains aside to look for him;—when I saw the scene enacting in the garden, I kept my place upon the balcony."

"Why?"

"I was not aware how far Tregancy might be trusted. Ellen Barchard is under my care."

"This does not account for Ellen's agitation, previous to my withdrawal from the room," said she, suspiciously.

"A link in the same chain; we were talking of your brother."

"And the very mention of his name affected her?"

"To my surprise, as well as yours."

"She has spoken of him before, calmly enough. She cannot love him."

"She hates him."

"I am sorry for it."

"And I am glad. Better in her grave than the wife of John Tregancy."

"How do you know that she hates him?" said Rhoda, imperatively. "Are you in her confidence?"

"No."

"You must know something more—she has spoken of him to you—has she not?"

"Her manner to-night was sufficient to prove her strong objection to your brother."

"You study this girl—you watch her, Philip," said she, with quivering lips; "her name is always ringing in my ears, coupled with your laudations."

"She is my cousin."

"Cousin!" said Rhoda, bitterly, "is that the excuse for all the interest you exhibit, the interest you vainly try to hide? It is well she leaves to-morrow!"

"If she is the cause of Mrs. Farley's present temper, it is well she leaves indeed."

"The contrast between the wife and cousin is too striking. The cousin is beautiful; the wife is old and ugly. Comparisons, they say, are odious—I should have known it."

A strip of music-paper which she had rent off in her vehemence, fell fluttering to the ground—another strip—and then another. She sat facing me, with blazing eyes and wildly heaving chest, a prey to the uncontrollable passions of her nature. She sat before me a reproach unto myself, for I had sworn to love and honour her, and had honoured but the wealth she brought me. It was no self-excuse that I was struggling hard to do my duty, striving to expel the first and strongest passion from my heart, and forget all, save those promises I made when I took her for my wife. There was a shadow of truth in her upbraidings, and of that truth I was ashamed. If her anger had exceeded common bounds, and made a violent woman of her, still I knew her nature when she was unwedded, for she had warned me of it. Self-reproach suddenly cooled me, led me to rise from my chair, and take her burning hand in mine.

"Rhoda, this is unworthy of you."

In all her old quarrels with her brother, taunt had replied to taunt, sarcasm to bitter reproof, and the fire had burned on, without an effort to subdue it. My method was new to her; she started as I touched her, but she made no effort to release her hand.

"Have you so soon forgotten your promise of a few nights since?" I said; "is this the end of the love-story, and have the shadows come already between us and the sunshine?"

"Oh, Philip."

"Do we date the misery of our life from your brother's reconciliation with us?—if so, he is indeed our evil genius, bringing doubt and discontent to sunder us."

The red stains on the cheeks and brow slowly faded away, the hand in mine pressed hard, the tears began to drop.

"Rhoda, you do not know, *you* will never know what my inner struggles are and what I have to war with, but you must be assured of one truth or we shall have no happiness again."

"What is it?" she murmured.

"That the duty of the husband is to honour his wife, to make her his first study, and that I will do my duty if you help me. I have sworn to do it in God's church, and needed it a sacrifice of every hope on earth I would try to keep my vow. Have I said enough?"

"More than enough," flinging herself into my arms, "more than your wilful wife deserves."

"There, Rhoda, don't sob so violently."

"Dear Philip," said she, her arms tightening round me. "You do not fear our future now?"

I did not answer.

"You will help me to be a good wife. You will check me when the evil in my nature seeks to start into the light. Kind words will ever tame me, Philip!"

"I may be stern some day. I am of a stubborn nature, and, like the tree in the fable, more inclined to defy the storm than bow to it!"

"Ah! but the tree was snapped asunder—had it given way a little when the storm was at its highest, Philip?"

"Have I not given way a little to-night, moralist?"

"Yes, and I thank you. Oh," cried Rhoda, confidently, "I am sure we shall always be very happy, and that these storms will soon—perhaps from to-night—cease for ever. You do not know how hard I will try to make them cease!"

Her earnestness affected me. I pressed her closer to me, forgetting my troubles, forgetting Ellen. The task was becoming still more light—I should soon love Rhoda with all my heart—I should love and honour her till death parted us; that was a portion of my marriage vow.

"And you will let John come to see me?—you will try to be his friend for his sister's sake; we may wean him in time from much that is evil."

"Ah! Rhoda, the castle-builder is herself again."

"We are so young a married couple; we have hardly settled down yet, Philip—hardly become accustomed to our change in life. We shall be more sober and less irritable when a few

months have gone by—when perhaps there is another tie to bind our hearts together ! ”

She hid her face upon my shoulder and shed a few more tears, not bitter ones, but tears of joy, of hope—the last shower before the clouds drifted away and left the blue heaven over us.

Sunshine and cloud, the blue heavens and the black, pass in their turn over the wide earth, brightening and dimming—so with the human heart, now in light, now in shadow, as the mighty hand of its Ruler touches lightly its strings. Weak heart that is pained by the darkness and cries out in despair, yet throbs not with gratitude when the sunlight is on it.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### DOUBTS.

THERE are certain crises which, at uncertain times, disturb the world of money-grubbers on Mark Lane into a state of anarchy.

The times are not few and far between when these crises occur, when hosts of shallow speculators sink in one general ruin, and men with money in their pockets are as nervous with whom to trust it as men with flour in their mills are diffident to let that flour go. Times following a bad harvest, a wet season, or a blight on foreign wheat—times following a season, even on which the newspapers have congratulated the general public, when storehouses and wharves are full of golden grain, and bakers in low neighbourhoods aspiring to the dignity of a Tackeridge are going “ Down Again.”

In seasons following the scanty harvest, when greedy speculators have garnered up their corn and barred the door upon it till famine stalks the streets ; when little tradesmen are shutting up their shops and slipping out at back-doors about two in the morning without leaving a card of address behind them, a crisis suddenly arrives. Those cunning rogues who have hoarded up their thousands of quarters find the scale against them, the prices sinking fast, and credit in many places sinking with them—each miller’s hand raised against his dusty brother, and a general scramble for the good things of this world, in which the simplest hearted get undermost and die.



A season wherein the harvest has been plentiful, and every little tradesman has been enabled to buy his score of 'seconds,' has its crisis too, sometimes. Fresh faces appear on Mark Lane, new millers suddenly spring up in the lists, competition increases, prices fluctuate, bakers at the wrong time buy a hundred sacks of flour and lose thirty pounds by the bargain, and millers, blundering in their purchases of wheat, discover themselves in the same net with the bakers, and the meshes which envelop them rather hard to break through. In such times lucky men make fortunes, and men ruled by a sterner fate go down the road to ruin. In such times everything is guess-work, the wisest, shrewdest head finds itself on the shoulders of a bankrupt, and the most silly idiot on the Corn Exchange becomes a man of capital and starts his carriage.

One of these crises occurred on Mark Lane two months before I became one and twenty. It had been threatening off and on for months—gloomy reports of bad harvests—fabulous reports of good ones—the prices of wheat and flour going up and down, and never steady for three days together—the tickets in the bakers' shops prone to surprising transformations—the whispering concerning doubtful firms increasing every day.

Mr. Tackeridge had alluded to the bad state of the markets on the day John Tregancy and his sister met at Wheatsheaf Villa, and those markets had not improved since that time. The crisis came about September—men of capital avowed themselves men of straw—Bankruptcy and Insolvent Debtors' Courts were always crowded, and the Corn Exchange was full of pale faces, anxious faces, faces masked by airs of perfect confidence, and faces one might have measured by the yard.

"I think the worst has passed, Philip," said my uncle, when I met him late one evening in the counting-house after the clerks had left; "we shall settle down now. I am glad of one thing."

"What is that, Sir?"

"That your money was not invested six months ago—I might have launched out with it and—ugh—lost it."

"It might have been of great service to you, Mr. Barchard," said I; "there's Mr. Mawkins, I hear, has made a fortune."

"And Mr. Mawkins is about as fit for business as my Ellen."

"I think your suspicions of Mr. Tackeridge were unfounded, Sir."

"Do you?"

"I saw him at market to-day, very brisk and jovial. He was buying largely."

"Buying largely, eh?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I should not care to sell him fifty sacks," remarked my uncle, "without he brought the money for them in his hand—the money understand—not a cheque. Have you finished looking over that petty cash account for me?"

"Yes, Sir."

"How much is it out, Philip?"

"Thirty-five pounds."

"It's very singular. Thirty-five pounds is a great deal of money. I'll speak to young Holts about it."

"He may have transferred the account to another book."

"Transferred!" said Mr. Barchard, with a growl, which was his extreme of petulance; "he has no right to transfer any account from one book to another—he's a big fool, and I have always told his mother so."

I closed the book and sat tilting myself on the long-legged stool, and looking at my old desk—at Frank and Charley's place, and at the window where Ike Boxham used to stand and take his tickets for the day.

"You will be twenty-one in two months, Philip Farley?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Has the late horrible state of affairs made you reluctant to risk your money in the flour trade?"

"No, Sir."

"You are not afraid of losing it?"

"I am not afraid of the risk of losing it, Sir."

"Ah! the risk—of course, I mean only the risk."

"The tempest in Mark Lane is fast subsiding," I said.

"Yes, for the present."

"For the present," I repeated; "and I trust no more wrecks are to be washed ashore."

"Who is talking about wrecks?" inquired my uncle.

"No one, Mr. Barchard, I merely observed that——"

"I heard what you observed," interrupted he; "and there is no occasion to repeat it. I," with a deep breath, "have been very, *very* fortunate."

"I am glad to hear it, Sir."

"Barchard and Farley will be a large firm, and we shall get on very well together, Philip."

"I hope so, Mr. Barchard."

"We will be very careful ; let no one run deeply in our debt. Nothing like being careful, Philip."

"You shall find me careful enough, Sir."

"If I had not been most careful during the last three months I should have been a beggar by this time ; richer, shrewder men than I, are not worth *that* now," snapping loudly his thumb and finger together. "I think, Philip Farley, you need not go over the rest of the books to-night," added he ; "there is a mistake of thirty-five pounds, remember, and it's a large sum. Mr. Holts ought to have known better."

Next morning, Mr. Holts accounted, with much blushing and stammering, for the mistake to Mr. Barchard, who, troubled in his mind concerning the large sum of five-and-thirty pounds, had made his appearance in the counting-house at the early hour of half-past eight.

Meanwhile, Rhoda Farley, in her home at Hammersmith, knew nothing of the business in which I was engaged, and took no interest in its progress. This apathy concerning my pursuits pained me more than Rhoda ever imagined ; I felt it hard sometimes to return full of Mark Lane topics—news of how wheat had fallen or risen—of the bargains I had secured or lost for Uncle Barchard, and see that struggle at attention which always ended in a fit of abstraction, or in observations inapplicable to my discourse. Never was a less worldly, or a more sensitive woman than Rhoda Farley ; speak of business, of money pursuits, of a lucky stroke that had earned its hundred per centage in a minute, and a marble statue would be about as animate ; but a word on music, drama, her home or her friends, and she was a rapt listener—not a syllable escaped her.

My ambitions became at last locked in my own breast ; there was no one in whom to confide—no one to encourage me when I felt flagging in the race, or warn me when I grew too speculative. I acted my part better than Rhoda ; if my wife returned from a day's shopping—that glorious era in the lives of the fair ones !—I inspected the silks and expressed my opinion on their quality, made critical remarks on bonnets and shawls, looked over the piles of new music and sat patiently but drowsily listening, whilst she played each piece over to amuse me.

Now Ellen was away, husband and wife had become more contented and happy. A still life, undisturbed by excitement

or too much society, was most fitting for Rhoda ; she did not care for the pleasures and frivolities of the world ; her pleasure was in her home, when those who loved the world were excluded.

John Tregancy was a lover of the world, and so—though Rhoda would not own it—he cast the world's shadow, always a dark one, over the home of the Farleys, whenever his foot crossed the threshold. We had sought Tregancy for a friend again, we had shaken hands together, and he came once or twice a-week and sat between husband and wife, seeking to amuse them with his irony and his scepticism—his jest at everything honourable—his doubt of everything good.

Rhoda looked grave at times—glanced askance at me to see how I relished the humour of her brother ; but often smiled at his sarcasms and thought them amusing. Tregancy, as the reader is probably aware, was not a favourite of mine. From the first day we were schoolfellows together I had been distrustful of him and his motives. In the days at Cliff House, he was a reckless and scheming youth, breaking asunder school friendships, and setting one boy against the other, satisfying his little-minded spirit by getting those whom he disliked into difficulties, perpetrating wanton acts of mischief occasionally, and brazening it out when detected with a coolness that astonished the masters. He had grown up to man's estate and become, as everybody had feared, an ill-governed, unprincipled, and hardened man, whose equal amongst the crowd I have not met with to this day. I believe Rhoda was correct in thinking her brother's fancy—I will not call it affection—had fixed itself on me in the school days which I had left behind ; but I was certain that he hated me now, with an intensity which no remembrance of the past could soften. He hated me because I had never been his tool—had judged his character too well—had married his sister and he had wished it otherwise—because I was Ellen's cousin and had, perhaps, by relating some of his wild deeds, first sown the seeds of antipathy in her mind—because Ellen was, I knew this afterwards, the one romance of his existence, and he thought that I had done my best to crush it. From the night Tregancy was rejected for the second time, his manner had been too affectedly frank and too full of brotherly affection not to give rise to some doubts of a secret motive for his friendship. I knew that he could brood over a fancied injury for years, and so I kept continually on guard. There was no warning Rhoda—seeing less of her brother had

made her less suspicious of him, and his show of fraternal feeling only brought into full play that love which she had had for him despite all his faults, and all her old protestations of eternal enmity.

There were times, too, when my suspicions of Tregancy were more than usually predominant—were forcibly aroused by a strangeness in the manner of his sister.

Tregancy was partial to calling at Hammersmith during my absence, and on those particular occasions the smiles welcoming my return were always constrained, and there followed an irritability or an absorbing sadness which lasted with Rhoda several days. No explanation had been ever given of this mystery—to my questions concerning it she had offered a denial of all reason; she was dull that day, her head ached; what was to make her thoughtful, Philip? Still, our life on the whole flowed peacefully onwards, like a rapid stream that might break its bounds some day, when the “winter of our discontent” had swollen its waters to a flood.

Not only a peaceful but a hopeful life, despite suspicion, mystery, and John Tregancy, for we were looking forward to another claim upon our hearts that would gladden home and brighten it—a baby-face that was to be a talisman against all evil.

And, God knows, that baby-face, which lit up home one month before my twenty-first birthday, worked magic in my heart and changed it! It stood between me and much that was evil; it crushed out my wilful love for her I thought too deeply of when the hour was too late; it drew me still nearer to my wife, and it made a better man of me.



## CHAPTER IX.

### A TRUE HEART.

WHEN Rhoda grew stronger, visitors began to arrive with their congratulations, and the heir to the house of Farley became immediately an object of great interest.

One or two fashionable visitors—acquaintances of Rhoda's before she had lost caste in their estimation by marrying a

millers' clerk—rustled in their flounces up stairs into Rhoda's rooms after the "Times" announcement in the list of births, kissed Rhoda and the baby, rustled down stairs again, and were never heard of more. Ellen came nearly every day, fell in love with the baby, as a matter of course, and scolded me sometimes for being so callous and unfeeling as to take but little notice of my first-born. But my notice was not for the eyes of my friends; I had a slight idea that nursing a baby of two weeks old was neither a masculine occupation nor fitting employment for a man of business, and so I laughed, and said, "wait till he grows bigger," and waited only till my friends had turned their backs to have him all to myself, to sit with him in my arms, and pray that he might be spared to grow a blessing to me. My heart had had its struggles lately, had been wrestling with evil, but now it turned to this baby-boy of mine and forgot everything in a father's silent love.

Mr. Greeney's opinion of that boy was almost equal to my own; "he had never seen such an infant—it was a surprising child; what a noble head it had! would the nurse *just* allow him to hold it for one moment; dear me, did babies always feel quite so soft; what a fine boy to be sure!"

Mr. Greeney immediately insisted on being godfather, and after a slight chat with Rhoda, and a long dialogue with me, went away, looking silver mugs and gold-mounted corals. John Tregancy came next to see his nephew, who burst into a convulsion of tears immediately the dark face of his uncle peered over the side of the cot.

Tregancy was full of his peculiar pleasantries that day, thought I made a fine-looking father, and had already assumed an important family-man kind of aspect, inquired when I thought of putting the boy to school, affected to be interested on the topics of vaccination and teething, and hoped that I did not intend to make a miller or a baker of my son, they were such unhealthy professions.

To all these facetious observations I replied by a laugh, or a light comment, till Tregancy relinquished his bantering mood and began talking of the Tackeridges.

"Do you know, Farley, those people trouble me a great deal."

"Are you speaking seriously?"

"Don't I look serious enough," said he, "serious as a man on a gallows, or a man going to be married?"

"In what way are you troubled, Tregancy?"

"Every way ; I am bothered, because I can't make the Tackeridges out."

"Can I assist you ?"

"You !" with a sneer, "you know nothing of life, how should you know anything of human nature ? I cannot discover, Farley, why Mr. and Mrs. Tackeridge are anxious to obtain me for a son-in-law."

"Are you sure that they are very anxious ?"

"Not a doubt of it ; so anxious that Annie fires up at their evident intentions, and will not honour me with the light of her countenance for days together."

"All this is palpable enough—you are rich."

"I *was*."

"You may be a few hundreds poorer than on the day you became of age, but——"

"But you don't know how money makes to itself wings," said he, with a short laugh, "when the dice-box is in the hand, and the game is a bold one ; I discovered that fact before I was one and twenty, and the infernal Jews, who speculated in my prospects, and made more of my coming of age than I made myself, discovered it also."

Tregancy was in one of his reckless moods, when he cared not whether friend or foe knew the state of his purse or his mind.

"Talk of your discoveries to Mrs. Tackeridge, and watch the wonderful change in her countenance."

"I know that she thinks me worth catching for her daughter ; but there are rich young men, with less questionable characters, who would snap at pretty Annie Tackeridge were the chance offered them. But it is Mr. Tackeridge puzzles me."

"Indeed !"

"He wants to see me engaged—married at once. Never was a loving father more anxious to get a daughter out of his house," said Tregancy ; "and although I am not quite a beggar, and can sail along the stream for a while before I sink like a stone, yet a marriage-portion would be really acceptable with the baker's daughter."

"May not Mr. Tackeridge and you be playing at cross-purposes," suggested I, "each thinking the other rich, and each deluded ?"

"Ha !" said Tregancy, with a start, "have you heard then that Mr. Tackeridge's fortune may be questioned ?"

"I have a friend doubtful of that fortune ; but it is fair to say without a proof."

"That would account for the worthy baker's anxiety for his daughter, but not for the fellow's flow of spirits. No, Farley, you are wrong, or else Tackeridge keeps wife and daughter in the dark, and Wheatsheaf Villa is standing on a quicksand."

"Will you chance it ?"

"When Annie says Yes ! They are badgering the girl every hour of her life to say it, I believe, and though she stands out, and fights her own battle like an Amazon, yet father and mother, against one weak girl, must win the fight at last ; there's no help for it."

"And yet you do not care for Annie Tackeridge, Tregancy ?"

"I don't know that," replied he ; "besides, if I marry for money—did not you ?"

"You used to think so."

"Time has not altered my opinion," said Tregancy ; "I have told you why I thought it was impossible to marry Rhoda for love ?"

"You have."

"Well, I'll not repeat it. And now, *brother*, you do not express any great degree of sorrow to hear that my prospects are not particularly bright."

"I hope they will improve."

"They may—I have a run of luck sometimes ; I win a trifle on a Derby favourite occasionally. Oh ! I have not yet come round with my hat to Mr. Farley's connubial bower."

"You will find Mr. Farley at home when you do."

"May I die in the streets," he cried, passionately, "before I ask you for a fraction of that money which would have come to me by right, had she—what a fool I am, all confidence one moment, raving mad a second ! Good-day."

"Are you going ?"

"Yes."

He came back in a quarter of an hour's time, to say that he had changed his mind, and would stay to dinner with me, if I were not already tired of his company. Five minutes after his return my cousin Ellen arrived to see Rhoda, and the alteration of Mr. Tregancy's intentions was thus fully accounted for.

But Ellen remained up stairs with my wife, and Tregancy and I dined together, to the former gentleman's extreme dissatisfaction. Ellen saw Tregancy for a few minutes, later in the day, exchanged a few formal sentences with him, and



then went back to Southwark Bridge Road, and Uncle Barchard's. The following day—a fortnight after the birth of my child—Mrs. Tackeridge and her daughter Annie surprised me by a visit. Mrs. Tackeridge was not inclined to drop Mrs. Farley's acquaintance; Rhoda was Mr. Tregancy's sister, and Mrs. Tackeridge's wary eye was fixed on Mr. Tregancy for her daughter's husband. Narrow-minded, blundering old lady, who thought she was playing her cards so well, and in so deep a game, who had ousted Frank Esden from her daughter's heart, and was trying to set up the image of Black Jack in his place—what a lesson to match-making mothers she would have made if Annie had been ready to say, "I will!"

But Annie Tackeridge had all her life been more inclined to say, "I will not!" she had had a will of her own from a child; she had been an only child, too, and allowed more of her own way than was good for her. Everyone has his fault, and this fault had grown up with Annie Tackeridge, and rendered her virtues less conspicuous. She gave in once during her life, like a dutiful daughter, to a naturally thick-headed mamma, resigned her first lover—and what a prize is that to a girl of sixteen!—and had never been the same girl afterwards.

Mrs. Tackeridge, of course, was charmed to see me; she had been always charmed to see me since my marriage, and expressed more concern, in words, for Rhoda's health, than any friend who had yet honoured me with a visit.

"Dear child, how satisfactory it is to know that she is doing well," said Mrs. Tackeridge; "and the lovely infant, too. Oh!" with her eyes upturned, "Heaven is bountiful with its blessings, and we should be very grateful! The poorest worm, Mr. Farley, who gets sometimes scrunched beneath the feet of the destroyer, has something to be grateful for."

"Not a doubt of it, Ma'am."

"And what are we all, Mr. Farley, but poor worms?"

Annie, anxious to put an end to her mother's pathos, proposed that their names should be sent up to Mrs. Farley, and prevented any further discourse on Heaven and worms by making inquiry concerning the health of Ellen Barchard. The servant returned to usher Mrs. and Miss Tackeridge up stairs, and I was left to amuse myself alone. Since the small addition to my family I had, with Uncle Barchard's permission, absented myself from business; but as Rhoda was getting strong and all was progressing favourably, I had resolved to return to Mark Lane and the flour trade to-morrow.

I was thinking of Mark Lane whilst the ladies were up stairs, when the servant entered with a card.

Now, in a work of fiction, the reader will find a hundred strange meetings and coincidences—old lovers coming face to face after years of separation, friends thought dead rising up at the corners of the streets, and the good characters appearing *ad libitum* to confound all the bad characters in the concluding chapters. Critics laugh at these wires which move the Minerva puppets, but real life has more often than we imagine its strange meetings and coincidences too, old lovers and friends do start as if from Hades into our presence sometimes, and if a good genius in the shape of a father, a big brother, or a policeman, did not come to the rescue at times when the last hope was failing us, what a deal more misery there would be in the world.

That morning, singularly enough, brought to my house two old friends of mine, two older friends of the ladies up stairs.

When I caught sight of the faces of my visitors I hurried to meet them and welcome them with all my heart.

"My dear Mr. Esden—my dear Frank, this is an unexpected pleasure," cried I, as I shook hands with them; "how's Mrs. Esden? why did not Charley come?—how glad I am to see you both. Pray be seated."

Mr. Esden's hair might have been the slightest shade more white, and the lines on his handsome old face more deeply graven, but he was as upright, as free of step, and as bright of eye as when I saw him for the first time. Frank had altered more than his father since my marriage, he seemed more tall and thin, and had lost all that rosy colour of which his mother had been proud. There was about the face a weary expression which I had seen now and then before I left the Dover Road, but which had since settled there and shadowed it, stealing away that look which was so worthy of his Christian name.

"Philip," began Mr. Esden, "I beg pardon—Mr. Farley—"

"No, 'Philip'; I like that name best from the lips of an old friend."

"Philip," said Mr. Esden, more heartily, "I am sure that we have surprised you not a little, but having heard of the addition to your family, and my Boy and I being out for a stroll; Frank's holidays again, Philip; we could not resist the temptation of calling to inquire after Mrs. Farley's health."

"Not having seen Mr. Farley for some weeks, and hearing that he had not been with Mr. Barchard," added Frank, quickly, "we were fearful lest something serious had detained him from his business, or——"

He stopped.

"Or you would not have called, Frank," said I, finishing his sentence; "there goes a flash of the Esden pride that has wounded me before this. Still, many thanks for calling. I wish I could thank you more often for the favour."

"It is not the will that keeps me away, Phil, but the necessity."

"A necessity of your own making."

"I have told you my reasons before."

"And very good reasons they are," said Mr. Esden, loftily. "We Esdens are too proud and too poor in our way for rich friends, though the friends have once sat nigh to our heart; but you have not told us, Philip, how Mrs. Farley is?"

I informed them she was making rapid advances to health, and that I intended to resume my business-habits on the morrow.

"I have thrown off the business-harness for a week, Philip," said Frank, lightly, "even a mill-horse requires a little change."

I did not reply immediately, and he said, with a light laugh—

"I know what you are thinking of, Phil—Philip."

"Spare me your corrections—what was Phil thinking of, Frank Esden?"

"Our holidays ever so long ago," he answered; "we spent them together—do you remember?"

"Well."

"At the sea-side. Ramsgate, was it not?"

"To be sure it was."

"What a precious while ago it seems, and what a number of changes since you and I were there!"

"Ah! Frank," said Mr. Esden, looking at him with his old fatherly glance, "and what changes in you and Philip, too. Philip married and a father, and opposite him Frank Esden who, as dear, quaint Dekker says—you have not forgotten my 'Wonder of a Kingdome,' Philip, with all its beautiful bad spelling?—'who desperately a prodigall race doth runne?'"

"It is time Frank left the race to other prodigals," said I.

Frank laughed.

"There's nothing to win in it, certainly," said Frank, "but I daresay I'm steady enough, only Charley happens to be so

fond of the fireside, that he makes me look quite a profligate in comparison."

"Not a profligate, Frank," said Mr. Esden, gravely, "but hardly what your brother and I could wish to see you. Don't say a profligate."

"Well, a man with little thought and less care."

"I am sorry to hear that confession, Frank," said I.

"Little thought," echoed Mr. Esden, "less care! I wish that you did not think so much, Boy."

"Nonsense, nonsense."

"And as for care——"

"There, there, father, our friend Philip knows me as well as you do. I have not altered greatly for better or worse since he saw me last."

He turned to me.

"Have you seen Mr. Tregancy lately?"

"Yesterday."

"I have not met him for an age," said Frank; "report assures me that he is going to be married."

"To whom?" I asked.

"Miss Tackeridge."

Frank uttered the name coolly and unconcernedly; time was healing his wound, or making him a hypocrite.

"Is it true?" said he.

"I do not think Miss Tackeridge will ever become Mrs. Tregancy."

"Stranger things happen every day."

"Do you consider the match an eligible one, Frank?"

"I have given no thought about the matter," replied Frank, with a carelessness that was rather overdone.

"My Boy has got over all that nonsense, Mr. Philip," said the father, confidently; "my Boy was not going to die of a broken heart for a chit of sixteen, no, no, no!"

"I am glad to hear that you have forgotten all that nonsense, Frank," said I. "I suppose you could endure even a meeting with Miss Tackeridge by this time."

"I should be a poor spooney if I could not look a girl in the face."

"By a remarkable coincidence Mrs. Tackeridge and daughter happen to be in this house at the present moment," I said, drily.

"WHAT!" shouted Frank.

"What, Sir!" exclaimed Mr. Esden, brushing his white hair off his forehead, in an excited manner; "Mrs. Tackeridge, that

purse-proud, arrogant woman, who thought her child too good—too good,” beginning to shake with indignation, “for my Boy! My Boy Frank, always a gentleman, who had a father and a grandfather for gentlemen too, who—Frank, what are you doing?”

Frank, always inclined to be headstrong, was trying to open the window.

“I am going into the garden, down these steps,” said he, tugging at the latch, “I shan’t see her—I don’t want; how the devil do you unfasten this?”

“Frank, we have seen Mr. Farley, and have heard, with very great satisfaction, that Mrs. Farley is as well as can be expected. Let us go home.”

“Very well,” said Frank, moodily, “I’m ready.”

But Fate—perhaps Venus—did not intend two old sweet-hearts to depart without a glimpse of each other; I do not believe Frank intended it either, for he still stood with his face to the window, as if the idea of proceeding to the garden was not yet abandoned.

Mr. Esden went to Frank’s side, and put his hand on the arm of his son. Frank shook it off angrily.

“I have told you that I am ready,” he said.

The door opened, and Annie Tackeridge came in. For the moment she did not notice the two figures standing at the window, with their backs towards her.

“Mamma has something confidential for Mrs. Farley’s ears, and has sent me down to keep you company, Sir. Oh!” catching sight of the gentlemen, “I did not know that you were engaged.”

“These are friends of mine, Miss Tackeridge, to whom there is no occasion to introduce you,” said I; “pray do not go.”

The Esdens, father and son, turned round. Annie, white as a sheet, closed the door, and timidly advanced.

“I was not aware it was Mr. Esden and Mr.—Mr. Frank. I hope I see you both well.”

The stately bow of the father—the half-reserved, half-embarrassed air of the son formed a striking contrast.

“Thank you,” replied Mr. Esden, “my son and I are quite well, Miss Tackeridge.”

“May I ask if Mr. Charles is quite well too?—my deliverer?” with a shudder, “from a dreadful death.”

“Quite well, Miss Tackeridge.”

"I have not had an opportunity to sufficiently express my thanks for that deliverance."

"I believe Mrs. Tackeridge expressed all that was required—more than was required—in a letter to my son."

"Will you be kind enough to tell him——"

Mr. Esden held up his one hand in a deprecativè manner. Annie stopped.

"Your pardon, Miss Tackeridge; but it is as well I think—I am sure you will agree with me—to refrain from past allusions to any member of our humble family. It was an accident—no favour, and Miss Tackeridge, I am proud to say, is under no obligation to my son. Any allusion to friends we have known in better days gives pain to me, my wife and sons, and surely Miss Tackeridge will spare us."

"Father," broke in Frank, impetuously; "you have no right to say that to Miss Tackeridge."

"Frank!" cried Mr. Esden, forgetting his cold, cutting airs of politeness, in a sudden fit of passion, "do you take part against me, and side with a girl who has treated you so shamefully—who, too young to know her own mind, was still old enough to lure away your heart and make a sport of it?"

"No, no, I did not," cried Annie, sinking into a chair and covering her face with her hands; "I did not do that. Oh! you are very cruel, Sir, for I am defenceless here."

She gave way to a violent outburst of tears, that upset all Frank Esden's composure.

He darted from the window.

"Annie, Annie, don't mind what he says," cried Frank, leaning over her and speaking rapidly; "he knows nothing of what has passed—he thinks that I have been treated unjustly—it's a lie—it's all a lie! I did not deserve you—you were too young, too good—don't cry, don't cry—we quarrelled and there's an end of it. Annie, don't cry for what he says!"

"I will go to mamma—thank you, Mr. Esden, I can walk now—I did not expect *you* to take my part—you, I—I—"

Annie Tackeridge had lost all her firmness at this sudden encounter with her first love—she broke down and began to sob once more.

Old Mr. Esden, bewildered, looked from his son to me, and gathered no confidence from either of us.

"If I have wounded Miss Tackeridge by my vehemence I trust she will excuse me," he began apologetically; "I am an irritable man at times, and to see my Boy——"

"Father, cried Frank, pointing to the window," just walk into the garden—*do*, now—Philip, take him down the steps a moment, for just a moment only!"

"I cannot suffer this!" exclaimed Annie, starting to her feet.

"Miss Tackeridge, I am not going to wound you by the confession of a madman's passion. I know that it is hopeless and valueless in your eyes. You need not fear being alone with me an instant—I would ask but two questions, which, had they been answered years ago, would have made me less reckless, less what I am now. Annie, I beg of you to stay—by the remembrance of that time when we were boy and girl together, I implore you!—it is the last favour I will ask of you—it is the last time that we shall meet!"

I was too much the friend of Frank Esden to wait for Annie's reply. Opening the window I pushed Mr. Esden towards the steps, and descended with him to the garden, leaving the victims of first love together. I could not repress a smile when I thought of Mrs. Tackeridge discoursing of John Tregancy and his prospects to my wife—I knew John Tregancy was the subject,—in blissful unconsciousness of the formidable rival below stairs, who was talking of the past, that fascinating, dangerous past! to Annie the firm.

Mr. Esden did not smile. Grim-faced as a wise old Greek, he marched down the garden with his head very high in the air, and took no heed of the companion at his side. When he reached the river's brink he said, whether to me or the Thames was a doubtful question—

"I would not have had this happen for the world."

"If any explanation can make Frank steadier, or easier in mind, no one is much the worse."

"Mrs. Tackeridge will think the Esdens are mean enough to seek to rob her of her daughter—think that all this has been planned between me and Frank. Mr. Farley," firing up again, "I can't suffer it. Good God, if that disagreeable woman were to find them in the room and us in this—this damned garden, sneaking about till the conference is over, what vile wretches we should look. I'll go back, I'll go back!"

"One moment," cried I, catching him by the empty sleeve of his right arm.

"Mr. Farley, if you don't want to make an enemy of me for life, or tear my coat to shreds, leave go this minute, Sir!"

"Think of poor Frank. What are Mrs. Tackeridge's thoughts to the peace of mind of Frank Esden?"

He paused.

"Think this is a scene in one of your favourite plays, and that it is the lovers' turn to rant on the rush-strewn stage."

"Ah ! you rogue, you rogue ; do you seek to oppose me with my hobby ? "

"Come and see my evergreens."

"I hate evergreens. I must go back."

"Why you are as obstinate as John Lilburne."

"What do you know of John Lilburne ? " asked he, quickly.

"I have not forgotten those ill-printed pamphlets of yours that you set such store by, written by that brave Puritan, John Lilburne—free-born John of history—prisoner in the Tower."

"In the Fleet," corrected he.

"In the Tower," I persisted.

"I tell you, Fleet. Don't he sign himself, John Lilburne, prisoner in the Fleete ? Fleet with an *e* at the end."

"Tower, my dear Sir, Tower."

"Now, Philip," began the old man, "if you will only remember, his 'Christian Man's Triall' is dated 'the twelfth of March, 1637. From the Fleete, the place of my joy and rejoycing.' Rejoycing, as he calls it, and sensible spelling, too."

"Very bad spelling, I consider."

"Why not a 'y' in rejoice as well as in joy ? " asked Mr. Esden, tartly.

"There is no 'y' in '*rejoir*,' from which we stole the verb."

"There is no 'y' in '*joie*' is there ? but we have 'joy' for all that, and—oh ! Philip, Philip, I see what you are after, it's very mean of you ; I'll not stop another minute."

He broke away from me and commenced retracing his steps, deaf to all adjuration. Fortunately he was too late, for Frank, without his hat, emerged from the parlour, and came down the garden steps.

"Don't go in now," said he, standing before his father and intercepting his progress. "Let her get away with her mother before we enter."

"Go back and get your hat," cried the alarmed father ; "walking about the garden on a foggy day in December, without a covering to your head. What a mad Boy you are ! "

"I shan't hurt," he replied ; "I'm all right."

"Well, Frank," I asked, "have you got your questions answered ? "

"Yes ; it was not *her* fault, but her selfish, hard-hearted mother's. I think that I shall be steady now, I'll try. Philip,



it was the remembrance of the way in which I was thrown aside that stung me and made me callous. The remembrance is not half so bitter now. I was too impetuous, too much of a fool that day at Walmer, I wounded her pride and she would give no explanation. But now ! ”

“ What now ? ”

“ Now I know that girl of sixteen, sneered at for being so young, was a true-hearted woman. Love came early, but it did not die in its spring ; it still lives.”

“ Frank, you never have ! ” exclaimed his father.

“ I have not entangled her in a new engagement as hopeless as the first,” he answered, mournfully ; “ we occupy the same positions, and there is no chance for me. But there is no chance for Jack Tregancy, or any other Jack, and I am selfish enough to let that truth make me happier.”

“ And when better times come, Frank.”

“ They’ll never come, Phil, don’t buoy me up with fallacies. I’ll raise no more castles in the air.”

“ I believe better times will come, Frank, if you have the heart to wait for them, to set your shoulder to the wheel, and work on patiently.”

“ If there was one chance in a thousand, I would not lose it for want of trying, Philip.”

“ Then try ”

“ Phil Farley,” wringing my hand, “ you are a good fellow, and give me new courage ; I *will* try, there ! We shall see little of each other as usual, but I shall think of you every day.”

“ And of Annie ! ”

“ Every moment in which I need strengthening I will brace up my energy by whispering her name.”

“ Have you done romancing ? ” asked his father, huskily.

“ Quite.”

“ Then go and get your hat. A hero with the influenza is not a romantic object.”

Frank laughed ; but said, “ wait a bit,” and then, escaping from father and friend, selected a path for his especial use, and began a meditative promenade.

The father looked wistfully after his son.

“ Was there ever such a Boy ? ”

“ A boy in heart still. He will be more steady, Mr. Esden, now he has something to think of and hope for.”

“ God bless him ! what a true heart the Boy must have to be so fond of that girl after all these years.”

"True hearts run in the Esden family."

"Is that compliment a salve to your late deceptions? It was the Fleet, Philip; come, confess."

"Will you bring me the book to-morrow, and prove it, Mr. Esden?"

"I will."

He paused, and his bright smile vanished.

"No, no, you are a rich man, and will be my Boy's master. Thank you, my dear Farley, but we, Esdens, must keep away from here."

Mr. Esden was firm, and further reasoning was useless. Money kept me and my best friends apart—of their thoughts and hopes I was to know nothing, now fortune had smiled on me.

Frank kept to his gravel walk and his reverie until Mrs. Tackeridge and daughter had gone away to Brixton, Mrs. Tackeridge, happy in having found Mrs. Farley of her own opinion, and convinced that Mr. Tregancy and Annie would make a capital match; the daughter happy too, yet thoughtful.

Annie had doubtless told Frank what I had heard her confess to my cousin Ellen, in the garden of Wheatsheaf Villa, and Frank and she were both reconciled in heart, though each saw no light in the distance, and each went a separate way.



## CHAPTER X.

"IN THE MIDST OF LIFE."

ONE AND TWENTY! Entering the battle-ground of life with confidence, standing on the threshold of my man's estate, and waiting for the door to close for ever on my youth.

Twenty-one years of a life that had had its adversity, its prosperity, that had witnessed and experienced many changes in the cycle now completed. Twenty-one years ago, when I drew my first breath in a room over a baker's shop in Harp Street, Bethnal Green, when a father and mother speculated over the future of their little boy, and prayed for his health and happiness in the years that were before him. Twenty-one years had gone by since then, father and mother

were in their graves, their son was married, and had a little boy to pray for himself.

The day had come—there were deeds to sign—I was to become my uncle's partner, and sink my wife's fortune, some twenty thousand pounds, in the gigantic business at which Uncle Barchard had worked so long and earnestly. It was a Friday, and I had engaged to meet my uncle at the house of his solicitors—East-end solicitors, residing within a stone's-throw of Mark Lane,—and there sign, seal, and deliver !

Uncle Barchard had had some conversation with me the day before at his own house, and had appeared very anxious to know if I was still in the same mind—if I was *quite sure*, *QUITE SURE*, I would put that money in the mill, and take my share of profit and loss, sinking or swimming with him from that time forth.

Uncle Barchard was not cold and phlegmatic as usual on the day before I came to man's estate ; for the first time in my life I had seen his hand shake, and heard his voice tremble. My excitement appeared to have affected him.

"And what lawyer have you engaged, Philip, to meet us to-morrow ? "

"Oh ! I don't want a lawyer, Mr. Barchard, there is nothing to inquire into," was my reply ; "I will leave it to your own legal advisers—they can manage for both Messrs. Barchard and Farley ! "

"Barchard and Farley," repeated my uncle ; "how strange that those names should come together after so many years. I shall never get used to them."

"What do you say to 'Barchard and nephew ? ' "

"Worse," he replied ; "no, let it be Barchard and Farley. Whom did you engage to-morrow to meet Cramp and Hodgins, did you say ? "

"I have not engaged any one," I replied, surprised at the repetition ; "I have just told you."

"Ah ! so you have, so you have—my head is very bad to-day."

Ellen looked up anxiously from some needlework.

"This dreadful heavy feeling in the head—I never had it before. It's very annoying. We had better drop talking of business to-night. I will meet you to-morrow. Good-evening."

He called me back as I was leaving the room.

"Philip."

"Did you call me, Mr. Barchard ? "

"Supposing—"

He checked himself, and stared at me.

"Supposing what, Sir ?"

"Never mind—it's no matter. Be at the lawyers' by twelve o'clock ; it's market-day, remember."

When I was outside the room with my cousin Ellen, she said—

"This coming partnership seems to affect my father, Philip."

"If my uncle repent, at the last moment, of adding my name to his own, or thinks I am too young to take my share in his business, he has but to tell me."

"I have asked him that question, and he has answered, 'Philip is as steady as I am, I would trust him with my last farthing.'"

"Your father's headache perhaps affects him. Strong men, unused to ailments, I have heard, are quite children whilst their indisposition lasts."

"That may be the true solution to my father's strangeness, Philip," replied Ellen ; "when you are his partner you must rouse him, persuade him to leave Southwark, and take a villa at Hammersmith, as near your own as possible, so that I can run in every day and nurse Philip the Second."

"I'll try my best with my partner. Good-night."

"Good-night. Next time we meet, Sir, you will be quite a man !"

Ellen had recovered her old spirits, her pretty face was restored to all its former bright looks ; she had said, 'Time will always cure a love-complaint,' and if her illness had sprung from one, how like a noble woman she had battled with it and conquered it. Frank Esden had given way to his sorrow, and sorrow had preyed on him, and weakened him, whilst Ellen had resisted hers, and been strengthened. But had Ellen's sorrow arisen from the loss of a loved one ? I had my doubts sometimes.

But I have wandered from my one and twentieth birthday, when Rhoda, restored to health again, offered me her warm congratulations.

We had arranged a party for the evening—our first grand party, to which every one had been invited,—even Frank, Charley, and Uncle Barchard had promised to appear,—and for which a quadrille band had been especially engaged. Every one was to be merry that evening !

"You will return early ?" said Rhoda ; "pray don't linger on Mark Lane too long with your brother millers."

"Trust me, Rhoda."

"John will be here early—you must make haste home to entertain him."

"I shall not be late."

"Friday is an unlucky day to superstitious women ; I wish you were to come of age to-morrow, or had signed the papers yesterday."

"Nonsense."

And with this manly observation I kissed my wife and baby, and set forth to seek my fortune.

I reached the house of Messrs. Cramp and Hodgins as the City clocks were differing slightly in opinion as to the time of striking twelve. I found Uncle Barchard awaiting my arrival before a table covered with green baize, on which were little parcels of documents tied up carefully with red tape, a great pewter inkstand, a pouncet box, and some sheets of blotting paper.

Uncle Barchard looked really ill. He turned his head as the door opened, and I saw then how bloodshot and inflamed his eyes were, and how dark and sallow his complexion had become since the preceding night.

"Punctual I see, Philip ; that's well. Punctuality is a great virtue. I made my fortune by it."

"Are Cramp and Hodgins ready, Mr. Barchard ?"

"They will be here shortly," said he, picking at the green baize in a fidgety manner that was quite new to him ; "you are not nervous."

"Oh ! no."

"Not afraid to enter into a life of speculation—for it *is* but speculation—to toss up a halfpenny in the air, and cry 'heads, fortune,'—'tails, bankruptcy ?'"

"I am not afraid."

"Times have been precarious—they may be so again. Don't say I did not warn you."

"Do you remember the evening when I came home from school for good, Mr. Barchard ?"

"Yes. What of it ?"

"I said, when I was one and twenty I would tell you of my progress with the world."

"You have been very lucky. You stand there a rich man, and I am going to take you into partnership. How my head aches, fit to split !"

"Not recovered from that headache yet, Sir ?"

"No, nor the horrible swimmings in it. I shall be glad when this affair is settled. Have you brought the money?"

"Of course, Sir."

"We will sink it at our bankers', under our new name of Barchard and Farley," said he; "we will go straight from here to Lombard Street, and lodge it safely at once,—twenty thousand pounds!"

He muttered the sum three or four times to himself; Uncle Barchard had been ever fond of money, and his love had not decreased with the years that had accumulated.

The door opened, and two slim gentlemen in black—lawyers are generally slim, and always in black—came gliding into the room, and skating round the table towards us. The slimmer of the two opened the proceedings.

"Good-morning, Mr. Barchard; good-morning, Mr. Farley; we have prepared everything as desired, and will now, with your permission, proceed to business. Not looking well this morning, Mr. Barchard?"

"I know it, Mr. Cramp."

"Ahem! Mr. Hodgins, will you have the kindness to give me document number one?"

Chairs were drawn close to the table, and the council of four sat down to a game at whist for twenty thousand pounds.

"Bad news to-day on your Exchange," commented Mr. Cramp, whilst Mr. Hodgins was loosening a knot in the red tape, "sad news—dreadful. Mark Lane quite in commotion."

"We know all about it," said Mr. Barchard, snappishly.

"What bad news?" I asked, "may I inquire?"

Mr. Barchard began picking at the green baize again.

"It's no secret—everybody knows it. Mr. Tackeridge has failed for fifteen thousand pounds!"

"Is it possible?" I ejaculated.

"Just what a miller and client of mine observed, to whom Mr. Tackeridge owes nineteen hundred pounds!"

"Failed—ruined," I muttered.

"He is not worth a farthing, Sir. His creditors on the market put his case—and a very bad and black case it is—into our hands this morning."

"And Mr. Tackeridge?"

"Is nowhere to be found at present."

"What did I tell you, Philip?" cried Uncle Barchard; "did I not see through all his jugglery long ago? I knew what he was after, though there was not a soul on Mark Lane to believe

me. 'I was a fool to a good customer, and over careful,' everybody said."

"Poor Annie."

"What did you observe, Sir?" said Mr. Hodgins, smiling blandly across the table at me.

"Nothing."

"Oh!"

"Thirteen shops gone to smash," said Mr. Barchard, quite exultingly; "down again, with a vengeance!"

"I am sorry for him."

"He ruined your father, Philip, with his opposition, and yet you say that you are sorry?"

"Very sorry."

"Well, it's not pleasant to hear of a man brought to ruin, although that man be a rascal who cares little how many he brings to ruin with himself, so that his day lasts the longer. A rascal!" he repeated, bringing his large fist on the table with a bang that frightened Cramp and Hodgins, who were as unused to any exhibition of violence on the part of my uncle as I was myself.

"Shall we proceed to business?"

"It has been interrupted long enough," growled my uncle.

Mr. Cramp commenced reading from document No. 1, whilst Mr. Hodgins got ready No. 2. I need not trouble the reader with the full particulars of the weary hour which followed, how the said Philip Farley and the said William Barchard did enter into partnership, and agree to take into partnership, to fairly share, divide and apportion, &c. &c. &c. The documents were nearly concluded, and to the reading of the last half-dozen I had paid no attention, being wholly engrossed with the singular behaviour of my uncle.

Mr. Barchard's eccentricity was increasing rapidly with every paper which Mr. Cramp laid aside; at one moment he was scowling at Mr. Cramp as if he was a deadly enemy, at another regarding me with an intentness which was embarrassing in no small degree, at a third listening attentively, at a fourth sitting with his eyes shut. But when a large parchment with seals and stamps affixed was opened and spread out on the table he pushed his chair away, rose, and began tramping heavily about the room.

Messrs. Cramp and Hodgins stared for a moment, then the former commenced reading the deed of partnership, and my uncle stopped to listen with both hands to his head.

Deed of partnership read and waiting for signatures.

"I am afraid that you are unwell to-day," I remarked to my uncle; "this business has troubled you."

"Out of my life."

"Now, Mr. Barchard," said Mr. Cramp, handing him a pen, "will you affix your signature by that seal, please?"

Mr. Barchard took the pen, leaned over the parchment, hesitated. Mr. Cramp, imagining my uncle had not understood his directions, repeated them.

"I know," said my uncle, and signed the paper.

"Now, Mr. Farley."

My uncle scarcely moved far enough from the table to allow me to approach. I took the pen and drew the deed towards me. I had written my Christian name when I felt the large heavy hand of my uncle on my wrist.

"Stop."

He drew away my hand, and said in a deep voice—

"I have altered my mind, I will not let this go on."

He released my wrist, snatched at the deed, and crumpled it together in his hands.

"It shan't be—it shan't be, if I follow Tackeridge to-morrow!"

Messrs. Cramp and Hodgins, doubtful of their visitor's sanity, had risen from their chairs and were sidling towards the door.

"Mr. Cramp," said my uncle, "I will settle all this to-morrow. Make your bill out just the same."

"Thank you, Sir—but—"

"But leave the room now—I wish to speak with my nephew and explain this—will you oblige me by going?"

"Certainly, Sir."

The lawyers left the room, and my uncle motioned me to resume the seat I had vacated. He took his place close to my side and stretched his hand towards me. I placed my own in his.

"Philip," holding my hand in a firm clasp, "I have to ask your forgiveness for having nearly played the villain."

"Not the villain, Mr. Barchard, I will never believe that."

"Yes, the villain—the robber!"

He breathed with difficulty, and it was several minutes before he could proceed.

"Philip," said he, releasing my hand at last, "since I took those large mills in Thames Street, everything has gone wrong.



I have speculated badly—I have made bad debts—bought at an ill time when I should have sold, and sold when I should have bought. The last few months have worked against me, too, and I have struggled very hard to save my credit. I have escaped, boy, a hair's breadth."

"What then—"

"Don't interrupt me. Oh! Lord, how my head swims," he held his head between his hands again and continued: "When you became a rich man, Philip Farley, I thought your fortune would keep the mill from sinking—when month after month brought ill-luck on ill-luck, I thought that fortune would rescue me from ruin, pay the heavy mortgage on the mills, and set me free. Don't you hate me, Philip?"

"No, Sir."

"I feigned large profits to allure you on—hoped to save my own name on Mark Lane by the sacrifice of your money—to pay my debts with all that you possessed. But, Philip," clutching my arm, "there stood between you and me my dead sister, and I could not abuse her son's confidence—take advantage of his youth and inexperience, and make him a partner in the firm that would rob him of every penny he possessed in the world."

"But if that sum will help you to retrieve your fortune, by working with it in the market now the times are better, I—"

"No, boy, no."

"You saved my father from ruin in the days gone by. I have a right to help you."

"You had your fortune with your wife—you have a child to help," replied my uncle; "I must fight my battle alone, I will not touch a penny of your money."

He rose.

"I don't think that there is any more to tell."

"I hope affairs are not so very bad, Mr. Barchard?"

"They may improve—they may improve," he answered; "no one but yourself knows, that if all my debts were paid off and the mill sold, I should not be worth five hundred pounds. Two years ago I was worth a hundred thousand, oh! dear—only two years ago that was."

"You will let me work with you—assist you as before?"

"Thank you, Philip; but I hardly like to rob you of your time."

"And you must let me thank you now for this confession,

let me tell you how my mother's brother will always hold the first place in my esteem."

"Have I not forfeited all respect?"

"Is it likely?"

"I have shown you what a crafty wretch I am."

"You have shown me a noble nature, resisting nobly a great temptation."

"Thank you, Philip," said he, meekly; "I can ask a favour of you now."

"Pray name it."

"If anything should happen to me, at any time, be Ellen's guardian whilst she remains unmarried; see after the little I may leave her, and do the best with it for my sake and her own."

"May the time be far distant when that trust is in my hands."

"I hope so," he said, moodily; "give me time, six more months, twelve, and all will be well enough, and I shall get back some of the money that has slipped through my fingers. We may be partners yet, Philip."

"In another year, perhaps."

"When you are two and twenty instead of one and twenty, eh, Philip?" he said; "come, nephew, let us go on Mark Lane and turn a few pounds before the Exchange shuts. I have not lost my energy with my fortune."

Arm-in-arm uncle and nephew went out of the lawyer's offices and along Mark Lane together. Hosts of friendly nods and "good-mornings" as we made our way down the well-known street—hosts of bakers ready to do business with my uncle as we entered the crowded Corn Exchange, and jostled with the mob of workers. A few brother millers came and shook hands with Mr. Barchard and asked if he were ill, and his customers who had seen his face on Mark Lane every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, for a long term of years, were struck by its expression and made the same inquiry.

"A bad head-ache—a bad head-ache," he answered, once or twice; but the constant repetition of the question irritated him, and he declined further conversation on the subject.

Mr. Barchard and I parted, each took up his particular position, and was soon working hard with pencil and notebook. Mr. Barchard looked so ill, and his manner throughout the day had been so singular and unnatural, that I caught myself looking over the heads of the people once or twice, in search of his well-known form.

But let the sands drop through the glass ever so slowly, there is a time when they end; there is a time for us all, and no matter the hour, for God thinks it is best!

Whilst men bartered and schemed in the service of Mammon, Uncle Barchard closed his note-book for ever and fell a dead man to the ground.

A moment afterwards I was kneeling at his side, supporting his head, with a hundred white faces around me. Voices calling "Unloose his stock!" "Give him air!" "Run for a surgeon!" "Take him up stairs!" rang in my ears, but my eyes, nearly blinded with tears, saw that no hand of earth's creatures could help him.

He had died at his post like a brave man—died fighting for home and his honour! History chronicles the deeds of the brave, who fall sword in hand with the stern foe before them, but history knows not of many as brave and as true, who fight to the last at their post—fight a battle as cruel and desperate in the byways of life, with no flag to be waved in the hour of their triumph, and no name to be praised if they die.

## BOOK VI.

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*“ O Lorde, what is  
this worldy's blysse,  
that chaungeth as the mone !  
the somer's day  
in lusty May  
is derked before the noue.”*

“THE NOTEBROWNE MAYDE.”

“ Mark it, Sir ; we say, man is not at age  
Till he be one and twenty ”

MIDDLETON

## CHAPTER I.

## "THE MILLER AND HIS MEN."

A FEW words, and let six months go by. They were six sad months to me,—more, they were six months of intense anxiety, in which my brain slept neither night nor day.

Sad months, for they were shadowed by death and my own disappointment; months of anxiety, for I had begun to plan and scheme for myself, to take my place with the old and crafty, and do battle in that field on which Uncle Barchard died.

I had become so accustomed to Mark Lane, and business with me had grown so great a passion, that I preferred a life amidst the shoals and quicksands to peace and safety on an open sea. Seven thousand pounds I had risked in the corn trade; there were some of the best of Uncle Barchard's customers to stand by me, and my face was not a strange one on Mark Lane Exchange. I made cautiously my first steps on the market, deeming myself as able to carve out a name and a fortune as those who had started in life before me with not half my advantages. The Mark Lane magnates were of a different opinion, and Mr. Crawley, who had seized the opportunity of getting the Thames Street mills into his hands again, was inclined to consider my mind affected.

"Pooh! pooh! the man's too young,"—"very absurd, he was only of age last December,—he knows nothing of business, how can he?" and—"he will go to the dogs, and serve him right for being fool-hardy;"—were a few of the observations by which my first steps were introduced.

But I went on my way undeterred by ill-wishes, with reliance in myself and my powers of calculation, and not even the knowledge of how hard Uncle Barchard had worked, and how poor was his gain in the end, stayed my progress.

Resolving to pause, when a third of my fortune was lost, and to fight hard with that sum whilst it lasted, to go up hill with confidence or down hill with fortitude, I set myself afloat on the stormy waters of trade.

I began at a good time when the reaction had set in, when those who had been losing money were slowly regaining it,

and there was fair buying and selling for great millers and little ones. I began by refusing all assistance, resisting the temptation of Frank and Charles Esden's services, determining that my old friends should swim with me when there was hope of success, but that I would sink to the bottom alone.

I took a very small mill in the neighbourhood of Chelsea, I put an experienced clerk in the counting-house, became my own seller of flour and buyer of wheat, and then I worked day and night, night and day,—worked even in my dreams. I took one person into my service whom I had known in other days ; he surprised me in the middle of Mark Lane, down which I was hurrying one Friday afternoon, by the offer of his assistance.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Farley," said he, touching a lock of hair that hung into his eyes from under a very dusty black cap ; "but you don't mind talking to me a minute, do you, Sir ? "

"What, Ike Boxham ! I hope I see you well."

"First-rate, Sir, thank'ee."

Ike looked "first-rate " as he stood there, with a grin on his broad rosy face, and with his stalwart figure, fit for a giant's, blocking up the narrow footway.

"Have you any news for me ? "

"I'm out of place, Sir."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Ike."

"Leastways, I mean to be out of place on Saturday week, at the old quarter," with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder, "if so be as you can find room for a chap at your new mills, Mr. Farley."

"Why—" I began.

"Stop a bit, Sir, look'ee here, Sir," said Ike, in an important manner ; "I know it's not a large turn out of your'n at Chelsea, and so I don't mind a shilling less a week—say two if you like, but I can't stand more than two comfurbly."

"You need not be afraid of your wages, Ike."

"I daresay not, Sir," with a grin that showed his enormous white teeth ; "and I fancy I should serve you well, Sir, for I know every street in London, am as strong as a he-lephant in the back, and a sack of flour is nothing more than a babby to me. If you can manage it, now ? " with an insinuating leer.

"Are you tired of Upper Thames Street, Boxham ? "

"I have been there a lot of years, ain't I ? "

"A great many years."

"Well, I like the place well enough ; but the fact is, Sir, I should werry much like to be one of your carmen. I've knowed you almost as long as I've knowed Thames Street, and though you and I used to have some rows together when you were — beg pardon, Sir."

"Go on, Ike, I am not ashamed of reminiscences."

"No, Sir," replied Ike, "and whoever they be they have no need to be ashamed of you, I can tell them. And as I was a saying on—Dashed ! if I haven't forgot what I was a saying on !"

"Something about rows."

"Ah ! yet for all that, Sir, you were just the werry boy as took my fancy, and I was as pleased, Sir, when I heard you were getting on, as if poor old Barchard—he was a good sort after all, he was—had taken me by the hand, curled my 'air, and sent me to boarding-school."

"And am I to understand you'll give up the old shop for a new one, Ike?"

"That's exactly it, Sir."

"If the new one fail."

"There's no fear of my being out of pience, Mr. Farley," said Ike, with another grin ; "so long, at least, as I keep my muscular cistern in order."

"Well, come on Monday week, then."

"Thank'ee, Sir," said Ike, "and you'll never have cause to say you wished I hadn't come. I have got over all my monkey tricks since I married."

"What, married, Ike?"

"Yes, Sir, and got two babbies—twins—such fat uns !" said Ike.

"I need not ask if married life agrees with you."

"Happy as a king, Sir !"

"Monday week, then, Boxham."

"All right, Sir."

Ike touched his lock of hair again, and strode away at a pace which only the seven-leagued boots could have equalled.

At the end of six months I could record progress ; had been lucky in my purchases and had no bad debts on my books. Uncle Barchard's best customers had rallied round me, and the mill at Chelsea was grinding corn every hour in the twenty-four. There was no fear of failure now ; my name was established on Mark Lane, and the young miller was getting on as well as the old ones. Business had increased lately to so great

an extent, that it was necessary that alterations in the premises should be commenced, and additional clerks procured.

One is never contented in this world, and I was getting ambitious and eager for a more extended sphere of action. My love of money began to grow upon me again ; some of the miserly thoughts I had had before my marriage gradually encroached upon my mind and narrowed it ; my whole energy became directed to my trade and it was no small effort to forget it out of business hours.

At the expiration of the six months I wrote to Frank Esden informing him that I required an agent and collector to take a share off my hands of that work which was beginning to press heavily on me. I said that I would not offer the situation to either him or Charley ; I left it for the brothers to decide, and added, that had I not been confident that the name of Farley would stand, and was as certain of ultimate success in the corn trade as it was possible to be in so uncertain a profession, I would not have offered it at all.

The brothers were several days arriving at a decision ; and, finally, Charley Esden wrote and accepted my offer. I confess to a little disappointment when the letter reached me : despite Charley being more methodical and business-like, Frank had always been my favourite, and although to both brothers I was more than ordinarily attached, yet I felt somewhat hurt that Frank had not resigned his place at Crawley's mills, for the sake of Phil Farley.

"We have had a difficulty to decide, Mr. Philip," Charley wrote ; "but Frank was the more obstinate, and so I am your humble servant from the 25th of the month. I think it probable, that Frank will be a collector for Mr. Crawley in a few weeks, so we shall both rise in life together ; I hope that we shall not cross each other's 'connection,' and get quarrelling for customers."

Frank sent me a letter also, which consoled me.

"I have persuaded Charley to fill the post in your establishment,—to which, by the way, all prosperity,—confident that he is the best man to look after your interest. Being headstrong and blundering myself, and wishing to see the best of hands on board your new craft, I have resigned my chance, and Charley goes first mate. I am sorry to lose him at my elbow in the Thames Street counting-house,—so is Crawley ; but I must wait for better times ; when you are a great miller and require agent No. 2."



A postscript followed—

“P.S. Milksop Holts talks of leaving, and looking out for a clerkship somewhere else. Do you want a junior hand?”

I did not want Mr. Holts for a junior hand at any rate, neither did Frank Esden propose him in sober earnestness; still it was my fate, or misfortune, to have that spiritless young man thrust upon me.

Early one morning Mr. Holts, arm-in-arm with his mother, called at the Chelsea mills, and desired to see me. Mr. Holts took off his hat, in a servile manner, and put it under his arm, and Mrs. Holts nodded an old-fashioned bonnet and heavy veil at me, in a style more free and easy.

“Good-morning, Mr. Farley,” said she raising her veil, after a nervous glance round her; “I have taken the liberty of bringing my Edward here, to speak with you—he’s left Thames Street.”

“Indeed.”

“He was too little respected at the mills to be comfortable there,” she observed; “too pious, and too fond of his mother to be anything but a jest to the young and frivolous with whom he was placed.”

“Sorry to hear that you could not agree with your fellow-clerks, Holts,” I observed.

“I felt it very hard, Sir,” he replied, in a husky whisper.

“Why don’t you speak up?” adjured his mother.

“I felt it very hard, Sir,” in a louder voice, and colouring to the roots of his hair, “for though I don’t mind being joked now and then, yet when fellows are always at it, it becomes aggravating to the feelings. If it had not been for the consolation of Mrs. Holts, Sir, I should have resigned my place long ago.”

Mrs. Holts, despite her weak nerves, was a shrewd woman enough, and her sharp eyes detected the little impression her son’s maudlin sentiment was making on me.

“Never mind talking in that way,” said she, sharply; “state your business to Mr. Farley, his time is valuable.”

Mr. Holts began in so weak a voice, varied by so many faint coughs and chokings in his throat, that his mother, becoming impatient, took the subject in her own hands, and very briefly stated her wish to see her son Edward in a firm, where there were fewer companions to disturb his equanimity, adding, that she hoped my mill might be considered suitable for the display of his abilities.

"Might I inquire, Mrs. Holts, how you became acquainted with the vacancy for junior clerk in my establishment?"

"Through Miss Barchard," she replied; "she heard you speak of it a day or two ago. I saw Miss Ellen yesterday afternoon, and she recommended me to come here."

"Well, Mr. Holts, I will at least give you a trial. You are pretty well acquainted with delivery bills and petty cash accounts by this time."

"I ought to be, Sir."

"Can you come next Monday?"

"Yes, Sir."

"And if you can manage to be a trifle more energetic here than you were in Mr. Crawley or Mr. Barchard's mills, I think that we shall get on very well together."

"I'll do my best, Sir."

"Edward, you can wait for me outside. I wish to speak to Mr. Farley, a moment," said his mother.

Edward, passive and sheepish, bowed to me, put his hat on, and crawled out of the counting-house.

"You don't think highly of him?" said Mrs. Holts, inquiringly.

"He will do for a junior," I answered; "I do not think him particularly bright."

"It's kind of you to take him. Thank God he is away from Thames Street!"

"Has he been exposed to many insults there?"

"No, no," she muttered, "nothing—it's nothing—his life and mind are haunted, perhaps, but he is a good lad at heart. Mr. Farley, as I am a living woman I think that!"

"I should be sorry to doubt it."

"I hope that he will do you justice; and may I ask a favour of you, Sir?"

I bowed assent.

"It's the first I have asked you in my life, and it's a very small one now. You see Edward is very nervous; like his mother, he is easily excited, or depressed. If you should notice any particular excitement or depression in him, Sir, or if any of the clerks should notice it—"

"He will only have an old gentleman for fellow-clerk."

"All the better—if *he* should notice it, then, will you write and inform me?"

"Will you give me your address?"

"Ellen knows it," said she, evasively.

"That will be sufficient."

"And how is Miss Ellen's health, Sir? I see her once a week, but that is not often enough to judge."

"Her health is improving rapidly at Hammersmith, but I am sorry to say that her spirits are not good."

"Poor girl! poor girl! it is hard to lose a father, and feel alone in the world. Does that man, that Tregancy, ever call?"

"Now and then. He is my wife's brother, you remember?"

"I remembered that when you first brought your wife to Mr. Barchard's house, and I was afraid of that relationship bringing about evil. Keep that man away from Ellen. I saw through his character when he first came courting her. I have had experience in evil faces, and I read him like a book. Keep him at a distance."

"Ellen can keep him at a distance better than I, Mrs. Holts."

"Ah! yes—true!"

Mrs. Holts commenced her preparations for departure, by pulling her bonnet further on her head, and muffling her face with the thick black veil; and after expressing her thanks for my acceptance of Edward as a clerk, and reminding me a second time of my promise to keep a watch on Edward's nerves, the mysterious old lady stole cautiously from the counting-house.

A moment afterwards she came as cautiously in again.

"I forgot to ask about Mr. Esden?"

"Which Mr. Esden?"

"Charles—a good young man. The only one except yourself, who showed an interest in the fallen fortunes of Mr. Barchard, and the sorrows of Mr. Barchard's child."

"Charles Esden?"

"Yes! He came the week after Mr. Barchard's death, and offered his aid to Ellen in any way or manner that she might consider serviceable. He was in earnest too—there was no sham about *him*. He was as truly concerned for his master's death and misfortunes as you were."

"And what did Ellen say?"

"He did not come to Ellen—he came to me. He did not want to disturb her grief by intruding on it so early after her bereavement; that was considerate; how is he?"

"Very well, thank you. He joins me on the twenty-fifth."

"If I know anything of human nature—and I ought—he will do you service. He was the only young man in the office who

took my Edward's part when the rest of them were plaguing him. And—oh! who's that?"

"Mr. Hedger, my clerk."

"What a turn he has given me! dear me!"

Mrs. Holts retired in a disturbed state, leaving me to ponder over the rambling speeches and statements with which I had been favoured.

When Charley Esden and I met for the first time as agent and master, and all inquiries after friends had been made and replied to, I thanked him, in my cousin's name, for the offers of assistance he had made her.

He turned very red in his good-looking face, as he answered—

"Oh! don't talk about that; I thought Mr. Barchard's affairs might be complicated—might take up too much of your time, and so leave me a chance to be useful,—therefore I called one evening at Southwark Bridge Road for orders."

"You are very kind, Charley."

"Not at all. I had been the poor old gentleman's servant from a boy; I had always respected him, and I don't believe any one was more sorry or shocked to hear of his death. If I could have helped his child—left so suddenly alone—in the slightest, even in the most menial way, I should have felt the better for it."

Charley was quite enthusiastic—so enthusiastic that I felt a twinge of that jealousy which I thought had been for ever crushed beneath an iron will.

"May I ask," said he, "how she is?"

"Who?"

"Miss Barchard," colouring again.

"She has not yet recovered from her great loss."

"It's time you tried to cheer her up a bit, Mr. Philip."

"I do my best."

"And if she—but it's time *we* talked of business."

"Ah! for women grief—for men, strife. The women to battle with their sorrow, and the men to fight with the world. To business, Charley, as you say."

So we began business, and here I close it, and return to home and Rhoda, and her who still mourned in her heart, though from the heart she had answered, "Thy will be done!"

## CHAPTER II.

## THE OLD DISEASE.

YES, Ellen Barchard had chosen her cousin's house for a shelter, and left Southwark Bridge Road for ever. It added to her grief to relinquish her father's home, and see everything that had helped to form it scattered to the four winds; it required no light effort and earnest argument to induce her to think of the change till the mention of her father's wishes, almost his last words to me, determined her. She gave in then, saying, with that mournful look which six months had not changed—

"Thank you, Philip, I must come if *he* desired it."

"I hope Ellen's pride does not make that consent a reluctant one," I said; "remember the past, when the only friend I had in the world took me under his charge and kept me from harm."

Ellen came to Hammersmith, and Rhoda welcomed her, as only Rhoda could welcome, when her warm impulsive heart was moved by another's misfortune. Rhoda had forgotten her old jealousies, and to behold the affection that she lavished on my cousin and the love which was reciprocated in return, was to believe that the old suspicions had died out with the birth of my son, and that there was no power to bring them back and cast their fire-brands in the midst of us.

Had not the gloom which followed Uncle Barchard's death rested on everything, we should have been happy during those six months, despite the cares of that business which weighed heavily on me. Our child was increasing in health and strength, Rhoda was well, I was making money, and John Tregancy was in Paris. When Tregancy returned to England at the expiration of six months, and Rhoda flew into his arms and "was so glad to see him back again!" when a smile now and then could be brought to Ellen's lips, tranquillity took flight and we were not far distant from the heaviest sorrow by which home could be afflicted.

John Tregancy had grown a moustache and pointed beard, that in my opinion added nothing to his beauty, and rendered him, with his swarthy face and fiery little eyes, not unlike an Italian bravo prepared to do a little stabbing on his own account, or oblige a friend if necessary.

He was full of good spirits on the first evening that he came to Hammersmith—related anecdotes of his travels and of the companions with whom he had met by the way—was an affectionate brother to Rhoda—a gentleman polite but reserved to Ellen, and quite a Damon or a Pythias to me.

I discovered the secret of his good temper when the ladies left me and Tregancy over our wine after dinner.

"So you have got Miss Barchard here again," said he, rubbing his hands softly together.

"Yes ; I thought that you were aware of it."

"No ; I left for Paris the day after Mr. Tackeridge astonished, not the Browns, but the bakers. I suppose you can guess the reason for my precipitate retreat ?"

"I can form an idea."

"I did not want to see Mrs. Tackeridge. That good dame might have fancied it my duty to provide for her and her daughter. To marry the last, perhaps, and comfort the first by calling her 'mother.' What a nice mother-in-law she would have made !"

"If you ran away to Paris for fear Annie Tackeridge should ask you to marry her, you started in a needless hurry, chased by a shadow."

"You don't think any one would be in haste to marry me, then ?"

"I don't say that, Tregancy ; it all depends upon taste."

"You are no judge of the wiles of the siren," said Tregancy ; "I believe, that if I had called on the Tackeridges, instead of writing, and 'regretting' business of importance had prevented me, &c., I should have found the fair Annie as anxious to free herself from her awkward position by marrying me as—what's the matter ?"

"That will do, Tregancy," cried I ; "you are mistaken."

"How do you know that I am mistaken ?" with a frown.

"Annie Tackeridge has been all her life in love with somebody who feels for her misfortunes instead of making a jest at them."

"Upon my soul we are two very queer fellows," said Tregancy, with a laugh ; "we can't help pecking at each other like a couple of spiteful women. How fond you are of me !"

"Allow me to return the compliment."

"Ah ! you don't know how much love is lost on my side," said Tregancy, with an affected sigh.

"It is easily calculated."

"Where are the Tackeridges, Farley?" he asked.

"At Wheatsheaf Villa, I believe," I answered; "affairs are not settled in that quarter yet."

"Nor likely to be, I'll wager; and Mr. Tackeridge, whose character you guessed so accurately?"

"He is keeping out of the way of his creditors, I have heard."

"So much for Buckingham, and now, may I ask—is Miss Barchard one of your family?"

"She is."

"Did her father die a rich man?"

I did not feel anxious to enlighten Tregancy on every point connected with Ellen Barchard; but knowing that from Rhoda he could elicit every particular, and that Ellen did not care to disguise her position, I replied—

"Far from it."

"Poor, then?"

"Last year was a trying time for millers. My uncle strove hard to save himself from ruin, and he escaped but by a hair-breadth. He left a name that was never sullied by a whisper of suspicion, against his credit or his honour."

"Wonderful man," said Tregancy, with a yawn; "and so Miss Barchard comes to Hammersmith. If I were you I'd turn a Mormonite."

"Shall we join the ladies?"

"Oh! by all means,—you were always a lady's man!"

It was astonishing how regularly John Tregancy called upon us after that evening, how interested he was in his sister, even in his nephew. Twice and thrice a-week he made his appearance, sometimes in an agreeable temper, at others in a decidedly unamiable humour. But as time went on the dark moods increased, and the amiable fits became few and far between—dark moods they were too, of a kind which Tregancy had not hitherto exhibited; there was less satire in them and more of a morbid depression that he took some pains to conceal, but which escaped neither me nor Rhoda—possibly not Ellen Barchard. Still if he came often, attracted by my cousin Ellen, I saw there was no hope for him and was secretly rejoiced at it.

Ellen did not exhibit any embarrassment at the constant presence of Tregancy—she and he sat apart from each other, and if he ever crossed to her side, she kept him at freezing point with the coldest of answers. Tregancy tried hard to win his way, but it was useless; he kept down many a bitter

remark for a time, lest it should lower him in her eyes ; he bore with her reserve, her indifference, and then—he gave way all at once, and was John Tregancy once more !

No more morbid fits, no more looks of abstraction ; he gave up the chase with a vow of revenge on all who had stood in his way, even on her he had been in pursuit of, and then he came as often as ever, but always in the character of the gay gentleman.

And as if the natural result of John Tregancy's visits was to make home less happy and bring discontent to Rhoda, my wife began to exhibit signs of that deep thought and irritation which had characterised her manner previous to the birth of baby Philip. Her strangeness seemed to grow upon her despite her own efforts to subdue it, and every day added to the mystery. Once I was tempted to mention her brother's name, and to charge Tregancy with sowing seeds of dissension in her mind, and she answered quickly—

“Don't think that, Philip ; he has not said a word against you.”

“John Tregancy can do more by insinuation than other men by slander.”

“You will never conquer your cruel hatred of my brother.”

“I have no confidence in John Tregancy, Rhoda.”

“It is painful to know that you look upon him as an intruder here, Philip.”

“If I detect a change in my wife after every visit of her brother's, I cannot look forward to his coming with any great delight.”

“You are full of fancies, Philip.”

“Are you happy, Rhoda ? ”

“Yes,” in a half-hesitating way ; “what should make me unhappy now ? You are happy in your business ; it employs your mind, and keeps you from idling your life away at the feet of your wife—so I am happy too.”

This slight allusion to my pursuits I took for the key to the riddle, and so refrained from any discourse of Mark Lane, my mill at Chelsea, or the incidents of the past day, when I was at home with Rhoda, Ellen, and my child. But Rhoda grew no better ; the cloud, no bigger than the hand, was spreading over all the heaven ; there was something on her mind which she would not own to me or Ellen ; and I knew, despite all her protestations, that John Tregancy was the cause. It would come out in its own time, Rhoda's natural impulsiveness would



let the secret escape, and so, irritated at her strange manner, I waited for the story. Had it not been for my boy, I should have devoted more time to the accounts and order-books at the mill, not have hurried home when the day's ride was over, or the Corn Exchange was shut,—I was growing so thoroughly miserable. I had done my best to make Rhoda happy, I had studied every whim, given in to her fits of passion, and soothed them by pouring oil upon the waters; had bent my guilty thoughts away from Ellen, looking on her as a cousin, and Rhoda as a wife who loved me. And amidst all this growing sadness it was touching to see that if Rhoda distrusted me, there was still no diminution in her love. John Tregancy had not shaken *that*, although it was a love tortured by doubt, and a passion that preyed on itself. The secret came to light one day, the old secret and the old disease. Time and my love could not cure it—it was a disease irremediable.

Uncle Barchard had reckoned on five hundred pounds remaining from the wreck of his past fortune after the mill was sold, and every debt cancelled, but by my exertions in winding up his affairs with his creditors, I was fortunate enough to save one thousand pounds for his daughter Ellen's share. This sum I was anxious to invest to the best advantage, so that when Ellen reached her twenty-first year—still looking forward to one and twenty!—I might place fifteen hundred pounds in her hands—perhaps more—and say, "It was your father's wish that I should do my best with it, and I have done all in my power." My study of that one thousand pounds was a deep one. I drove hard bargains with it on the market; I sunk it in my own mill when I knew that mill would prosper; I kept a book of its progress, and the interest it made, and marked "Ellen" on the cover, the first cash-book that was ever christened by a lady's name.

Ellen was unselfish and unworldly, and the loss of her father's fortune had not affected her one instant; her father's death had usurped every feeling of sorrow, and left no room in her heart to regret the money that had drifted away. But still it was necessary at times to speak of money-matters; nothing was done without her consent, or without attempting to make her understand on what project her little fortune was embarked, and so Ellen endeavoured to comprehend me, and for my sake feigned at times to be interested in the details.

Early one morning, before I started for my mill, I had concluded one of my explanations, and Ellen having consented to

everything without understanding it, I was going away with a laugh at her credulity.

"If I was a sharper, Ellen, one of those rascally trustees we meet with in books or on the stage, what an easy task it would be to escape with every farthing."

"Oh! I have faith in my cousin, faith enough to think he will make me a fortune,—he is very shrewd in money-matters."

"Who told you that?"

"Father," with a heavy sigh.

Ellen's reveries were long and deep when they had the father to dwell on, therefore I hastened to divert her from that train of thought which was taking possession of her mind.

"Do you know, Ellen, three of my new followers are deserters from the old mills in Thames Street?"

"Three?" said Ellen; "you have only mentioned one name to me—Mr. Esden's."

"The others are lower-class gentry, but they were as anxious to enlist under my flag."

"Do I know them?"

"One is named Boxham."

"I do not remember the name."

"And the other is a son of your father's late housekeeper."

"Mr. Holts," with more interest; "then you *have* engaged him. His mother was anxious that he should leave Thames Street and enter your service. Mrs. Holts is very fond of him."

"Have you seen him, Ellen?"

"I have seen him once or twice—he appears to me a very weak-minded young man."

"So he does to everybody else."

"Is he unfit for his post?"

"He is very slow; but his post is not an important one, and does not require a great amount of attention," I answered; "you appear interested in Mr. Holts, Ellen."

"No, not very interested," she said, in a hesitating manner; "I have always pitied, felt for his mother, but then I know more about his mother—and very likely more about him too, poor fellow—than Mr. Philip Farley is aware."

"Is there a secret behind, Ellen?"

"A secret which does not concern you or me, which would take up your time without occupying your attention. I suppose you find all your new followers serve you well—that is, faithfully?"

"Yes."

"Even Mr. Holts?"

"Again that young gentleman's name! Yes, even Mr Holts, who keeps his books correctly, and whose petty-cash accounts are always right to a halfpenny."

"I shall have good news for Mrs. Holts to-morrow."

"Shall you see Mrs. Holts to-morrow, Ellen?"

"Oh! yes, every Sunday afternoon when I go out for my little meditative walk, at one spot and at one time I always meet Mrs. Holts."

"Mrs. Holts is quite welcome here; why make appointments in the street?"

"Appointments!" said Ellen, colouring; "I never said that it was an appointment. Mrs. Holts is a proud woman as well as a good one, and the pride of her poverty will not let her come to this house."

"But if Mrs. Holts is so attached to you, Ellen, surely she—"

"She will not come, there," said Ellen, tired of the topic.

"She appears a lady inclined to be very mysterious about small matters; I cannot exactly make her out."

"Take my word for it, Philip, that she is a good woman and a just one, and did you know her better you would esteem her more."

"Well, I am losing time. Mrs. Holts stops the way to Chelsea. Good-morning, Ellen."

I opened the door suddenly, then stood motionless. Rhoda was standing before me, she had had no time to escape. As I looked sternly at her—more sternly than I had ever looked in my life—she put her hands before her face.

"Have you forgotten anything, Philip?" asked Ellen, without looking in the direction of the door.

"No—good-day."

I went into the hall and closed the door behind me.

"Come, Rhoda, do not stay here," I whispered, "lest she within should be pained by this unworthy action."

The sense of shame left Rhoda, and the hands dropped from the agitated face.

"She!" exclaimed Rhoda, with a mad stamp of her foot, "always considerate for her; always Ellen, Ellen, Ellen!"

She crossed the hall, opened the door of the drawing-room, entered and sat down.

"Why do you not go to business, Philip? you have trifled away time this morning," she said, in choking accents; "you are very late."

"I shall not go this minute, Madam."

"As you please."

"I shall not go until I have demanded the reason for this morning's act; a base and ungenerous act to me—one still more insulting to her you call your friend, and whom you pretend to love, and an act most degrading to yourself."

"You are lavish in reproaches."

"Will you tell me?"

I was in no mood to seek conciliation, though I should have known by that time that Rhoda's nature was a stubborn one, and resisted harsh dictation.

No answer.

"Will you tell me?"

"No!"

"Thank you; then it cannot be any satisfaction to know that I can guess the reason—that I see you have given way once more, and become a prey to your own distrustful nature."

"I have good reason to distrust."

"That conversation which you overheard this morning between me and Miss Barchard afforded you the reason, perhaps?"

She did not answer.

"Rhoda, I am tired of this folly—you but make promises to break them, and become needlessly unhappy by raising sorrows out of nothing. Will you tell me of what you are afraid? Is it of that poor sorrowing girl whom I have just left?"

"Every word of hers is precious to you. You stay to hear of 'Mr. Holts' and 'Mrs. Holts,' caring not for either—caring only to listen to her voice, and watch her!"

"She had previously spoken of her father, and the mention of his name threatening to bring on one of those fits of brooding from which you have so often tried to rouse her, I did my best to divert her attention from a painful subject,—surely *you* know that."

"Spare the wife your sarcasm, Sir!" cried Rhoda, with flashing eyes; "you once played the eaves-dropper when you were interested in Ellen Barchard, and feared my brother for a rival! You remember that night?"

"And you do not? That night, Madam, witnessed your promise that an hour like this should never come again."

"And you made many promises too, and have broken every one of them."

"It is not true."

"You have, you have!"

"Are you so fearful of Ellen that—"

"I am fearful of *you*," she interrupted; "I hope she is all that is good, that she is ignorant of that secret you think so deeply hidden, but which so many eyes have seen."

"John Tregancy's eyes!"

"John Tregancy is not blind."

"John Tregancy is a liar!" I shouted, "and no liar shall come into my house to set the wife against the husband. Think of this, Mrs. Farley; I say that he shall never enter my door again, if his teachings are followed and my honour thus suspected."

I went out of the room with a flushed cheek, and marched off to business, and found no attraction in it that day, the excited face of my wife coming athwart all my money studies, and marring patient thought. In the mill, where the small, old-fashioned engines worked; peering over the great account-book before which I sat, and clutched my head between my hands; beside me in my chaise when I drove out in search of orders, always the face of Rhoda, with that strange look in the eyes that haunted me everywhere, and robbed me of my peace.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### LOVE AND TRADE.

A FEW days witnessed the dispersion of the storm, and the setting in once more of a treacherous calm. No understanding, no further explanation took place between Rhoda and me; for two days she had sulked like a child, after that she had veered gradually round to her usual manner. John Tregancy came as usual to amuse us with his stories of the world, and I, assuming my old habits of indifference, let him take his place in my home and act as best pleased him. But I bided my time, waiting only to prove the result of his teachings to pronounce him a villain and forbid him the house.

Well may I have thought it a treacherous calm, when beneath the still waters lurked so many strong passions, waiting only a signal to start forth into being.

Ellen alone sat unconsciously in the midst of us, guessing

nothing of deceit, and in her innocence suspecting nothing. She did not observe how Rhoda watched her and me, how her eyes glanced from one to the other as if we were conspirators, and each look was a sign, and each word hid a meaning but known to ourselves. And this constant, never-dying distrust, began to work in me a spirit of resistance, which I did my best to subdue for the sake of her I had wedded, and more than all for the sake of Ellen. But Ellen saw nothing, for Rhoda loved her despite her suspicions, and alone in my absence they were sisters together. I had loved her once myself, before I had owned it in my heart, and when my eyes were blinded by ambition; Tregancy had fallen before the same shrine, too, been attracted by everything in her nature that was the very antithesis to his own, and now there was to come another—a more faithful heart than mine or Tregancy's. It is not my intention to dwell long upon this new story, although one of patience and true love, and from which many a lesson might be educed. It is not my story, it influences mine but little, and I care not to follow it deeply. It had its romance; it had been kept back long and hidden securely; it contrasts so strongly with my own failings and shortcomings, that I would fain slur it over, or say nothing of it here.

The story is Charley Esden's,—quiet, methodical Charley, whose life flowing peacefully on has given me but little opportunity to dwell upon it in these pages of error. Steady young men, virtuous young men—what a mocking name that last to us weaklings!—figure so faintly in a book, and are in real life but the bright spots in the background—stars in the sky, grand in themselves and in the eyes of their Maker, but afar off from us!

The increasing business at the Chelsea mill often rendered Charley's attendance at my house in Hammersmith absolutely necessary. A rigorous inspection of the books, the transferring of money to my hands after his return from a long drive and when the counting-house at Chelsea was closed for the night, brought him to my villa, where Rhoda and Ellen always made him welcome. Proud, shy Charley Esden was a great deal embarrassed to begin with, but he had the soul of a gentleman, and when his reserve wore off he reminded me of his brother Frank. I have written 'proud Charley Esden,' for unless business called him to Hammersmith, he would never sit at the table of his master, though there was beneath my roof an attraction which would have tempted a weaker-minded man.

Yes, he loved Ellen too—had loved Ellen in a foolish, romantic boy's heart, when she was his master's daughter and far above his dreams. He had loved her without a thought for himself; for true love can live on despair, though men say it dies when hope is denied it,—but then true love is as scarce as the phoenix. We are told that in this age everything is adulterated, and that in the records of trade, the noun purity exists not; true and sad confession, but truer and sadder to know that that passion which court, camp, and grove have succumbed to, will no longer bear analysis in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. Charley's was an exception, but then he was an exception to most men—for next to looking at Ellen and listening to the musical tones of her voice, Charley was fond of home, and of being with his mother and father; he hated the night and the streets.

My cousin Ellen might have had a faint suspicion that Charley's look of interest, Charley's profound air of reverence—that old-fashioned air of reverence, which almost died out with chivalry—had its rise from the heart; but Charley made no further sign and she could not repel him or—love him. I did not think she could love him, I was certain a great bar lay between her thoughts and his, and that those two would never stand hand-in-hand at an altar.

Truly, I was not sorry that they knew little of each other and met but occasionally. I did not love Ellen Barchard, yet I did not wish to see her married. Was there then left a spark from that fire, which I thought had long since burned out? Charley Esden was the soul of honour. When he had loved without hope he had buried his passion, worked harder at business and kept the name of Ellen sacred; but now there was a faint chance, now her altered position had drawn her nearer to his own, he spoke out one morning with a face like a peony—spoke boldly out, too, for Charley was not a young man to be ashamed of an honest affection.

"I don't want, Mr. Philip, to intrude upon those troubles of mind from which she has hardly recovered—not for years, if need be—for I have courage to wait. But," with his earnest brown eyes fixed on me, "I should not like to be loving her, hoping for her, and yet keeping you, her nearest relation, in ignorance—that would be too much like a snake in the grass for an Esden. In time, you know, Mr. Philip, I shall make four or five hundred a-year at this agency, and I should then be able to offer her a home—not a very grand one—but one

with which she would be content, *if* she loved me. Oh ! that 'if,' Phil !”

“But my dear Charley,” said I, “how mad to nurse a hope for years, perhaps, and then be disappointed—to fling away other chances of happiness in pursuit of a something that may never be realised.”

“It may not be realised,” said Charley, mournfully ; “when I think of it soberly, I feel that it will not, but I feel too that I shall never care for anybody else. Why, who am I to like after Ellen Barchard ?”

“She may love another.”

“I can't help it. That will not hinder me thinking less of her.”

“It would hinder most people.”

“Don't believe it.”

“No one, to hear Charley Esden at this minute, would imagine him so shrewd a man of business.”

“It may seem precious foolish, talking of Miss Ellen with a pen behind my ear and a big ledger in my hands,” said Charley, with a slight laugh ; “but she has been on my mind so long a time, that I thought I would make a clean breast of it. Had you been poor Mr. Barchard, or an older man than I—or Miss Ellen herself, good Heaven !—I should have burst a blood-vessel in telling the story.”

He laid the book on the desk and took up his hat.

“I'll start now—the chaise has been at the door these five minutes. Any change in the selling price to-day, Mr. Farley ?”

“No ; keep the same to good buyers—you may add an extra sixpence to those who take long credit.”

Love upset business again.

“I wonder what Miss Ellen would think of these conferences—she, who knows nothing of my ambition—she, so good, so beautiful, so much above me ! I hope you will not let my secret escape in confidential moments ; I may never tell it myself, may never have the chance ; but don't betray me, Mr. Philip. I have only told you because you are, as I may say, her guardian, and I hate anything under-handed. Add sixpence a sack to the gentlemen fond of credit ; all right, Mr. Philip.”

He stopped at the door and said—

“I am sure that she will never give a thought to me, and that I shall die an old bachelor, but somehow I don't feel any the worse for thinking about her, and if it be only a romance,—I am sure it's to be only a romance like one of my dear dad's



dusty and dog's-eared treasures in that back room up stairs—never mind. We cannot have all that we wish for in this world, that's not very likely; and the same selling price you say—good-morning.”

Charley was more excited and less philosophical the following evening when he met Tregancy at my house. Charley was the quiet, well-bred gentleman till he had an opportunity of speaking to me in the hall after he had bidden the ladies and Mr. Tregancy good-night.

“You don't mean to say that he is the man I have to fear, or that Ellen may love *him* some day,” said Charley, in a deep voice.

“He—who?”

“Mr. Tregancy.”

“Do you think it probable?”

“I don't know—I hope not!” he answered. “Yet he is clever—a good dissembler—oh! Philip, I'm not speaking for myself now—I set every feeling of my own aside, but don't let him win upon her heart, for God's sake!”

“There is nothing to fear, Charley.”

“Are you sure?” he asked, eagerly.

“Sure.”

“He looked at her once or twice,” said Charley, jealously; “I saw him stare at her once when she was speaking to you to-night as—as—never mind what as—but it made me afraid for her sake lest he had a right to look like that. Does he come often, Philip?”

“Not very often now.”

“I'm glad of that; but I have no right to be talking here about Miss Barchard—it's only a romance of mine, you know, don't tell her; good-night.”

And he jumped down the steps and ran out of the front garden into the roadway just as his brother Frank would have done in similar circumstances.

To my surprise that brother Frank came to the Chelsea mills next day, arm-in-arm with Charley; Frank, hot and flustered, and Charley as cool and collected as though he had lent his brother his last night's excitement to take care of.

“What, Frank!”

“How d'ye do, Philip?” shaking hands with me; “you must excuse me for interfering in business hours, but I could not stop till the evening, especially as Charley thought you might know.”

"Know what?"

"Where the Tackeridges have gone?"

"Have they gone, Frank?"

"Oh! you don't know; I told you that he wouldn't know; Charley, and there's not a chance left for me—it's all up—it's all up!"

Frank was tearing away his arm from his brother's previous to darting back to Dover Road or Thames Street, when I said—

"Stay a moment, Frank. Be calm, there's a good fellow. Cannot you give me a word or two of explanation? What does it all mean?"

"She's gone. They have both gone, mother and daughter. The things have been sold by auction. Wheatsheaf Villa is to let, and not a soul in the world knows what has become of the family. They kept me in the dark, led me to imagine they were not going for weeks, and then—oh! I shall never see her again; I am sure of it!"

"Perhaps she will write to you, Frank," said I; "be calm."

"How can I be calm when you keep on aggravating me!" shouted Frank; "she has written, I told you so."

"Excuse me Frank, but—"

"But I *did* tell you. That's the worst of it, the letter. That's why you see me here, because she gives no address, and I thought that you might have heard in the way of business where Mr. Tackeridge had got to. Here's the letter. Read it out, please."

I read aloud the following little note, written hurriedly, and blistered with a tear here and there; perhaps Annie's—perhaps Frank Esden's:—

"DEAR FRANK,

"We are going away. It was no use telling you not to come, and so we have adopted the only course left us, to steal away from here. God bless you, Frank; I have been happier the last few weeks than I shall ever be again; but it was an unenduring happiness, and this day sees the end of it. We were never intended for each other, Frank; there were insurmountable obstacles that kept us away from each other a little while ago, and there is a greater barrier left to divide us in our poverty—my pride! We are going to my father. Good-bye. Try and forget

"ANNIE."

The reading of the letter had a wonderful effect on Frank. He calmed down and hastily wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

"Look at that silly brother of mine, half inclined to burst out blubbing," said Frank, "and yet here am I as hard as the rocky bed of a stream which misfortune has dried. Yes, Phil, I have lost her now."

"Never despair."

"Oh ! you are always talking like a copybook, when the only thought that cheers me up is blowing my brains out."

"Did I talk in vain last time, Frank ?"

"No," said he, as he thrust the letter in his waistcoat pocket, and buttoned his coat carefully over it, "but there has been an alteration since then. Oh ! Phil, I have not been the same fellow since Mr. Tackeridge was ruined. I have been helping them all with their books, fighting their battles with the whole world against them, Mrs. Tackeridge quite a friend to me, and Annie—Annie, just as she used to be when I was her boy sweetheart, only she would say to me, sometimes, 'I wish you would keep away, Frank—I shall never be your wife now.'"

"She told you that ?" I said.

"Yes, but I did not believe it—I thought that I should get over that sort of obstinacy, for her heart was on my side. There was nothing to hinder my being happy, they were so nice and poor—Lord forgive me, I don't mean that !—I could have married her to-morrow, and she would have been contented with a little house and all my big love to fill it, if it had not been for that—that pride of hers which has brought forth this bitter fruit !"

"You will find them again—they cannot be far off."

"How do I know they are not off to Australia ?" cried Frank. "Why they may have sailed yesterday ! Oh ! Philip, what a miserable wretch I have been all my life, and what a miserable life lies before me !"

"I think the Tackeridges have gone down in the country somewhere," said Charley.

"Somewhere !" repeated Frank, indignantly ; "what an ass you are, Charley, what's the good of somewhere ? I know what this will end in."

"Nothing serious, I hope."

"I shall go out of my mind, that's all."

"Nonsense," said Charley.

"Don't be mad enough to give way, Frank," I said ; "do

not recklessly break from your new resolutions. It is manly to look misfortune in the face."

"Copybook again, by George!" cried Frank, "how horribly annoying you are! I shan't have time to be unsteady, for every spare moment of mine will be spent in the search of her. I say, Philip, what do you think of Annie's letter?"

"It says enough to content you, for it shows that she loves."

"Yes, yes, it shows that, does it not?" with his eyes sparkling, "and I shall find her. She will write to me again some day—some early day, perhaps."

I said "Very likely," but I had grave doubts on the subject.

"I've a precious good mind to give up Crawley's, and spend a month in searching for her."

"You would not find her, Frank, and you would lose that only chance in life which will enable you to make her your wife one of these fine days."

"Ah! I'm bound hard and fast, now. And so you know nothing about her?"

"Nothing."

"Has she not written to Miss Barchard?"

"Not a line."

"She is sure to write to Miss Barchard," said Frank, catching eagerly at another straw, "she may give her the address too. You will procure it for me, Philip?"

"I will do all in my power."

"Many thanks, Philip. If I have said anything rude and unfriendly this morning you will look over it and put it down to my excitement and perplexity; and don't forget the address. Good-day."

Annie wrote to Ellen Barchard as Frank Esden had anticipated, but no address was affixed to that loving letter of farewell which she took of an old friend. "Her friends of the past" she wrote "were no longer for her. She had a new life to enter upon, new duties to fulfil, and could act best her part amongst strangers if there was no one to speak of the better days she had seen. She repined not," she added; "even much of her old self-will had left her; she had been afflicted, but affliction had taught her its lesson, and she was content."

I wrote to Frank, informing him of the letter Ellen had received, and Frank was a sterner man from that day. He did not break out as of old, for if there were little to hope for in the future, there was still something in the past to console him,

Ere I turn again to my own story—that is, the story of my wedded life, which was growing more gloomy every day—let me dwell on one slight incident that occurred about this time, and that, for reasons which will appear hereafter, connects it with this history.

One evening in the middle of autumn, I arrived at the Chelsea mill two hours before my usual time. Rhoda being far from well at home, and her irritability and fits of gloom being still on the increase, I had omitted part of my customary round that day in my anxiety to reach home as soon as possible. Driving fast into the mill yard it was nearly my misfortune to run over Mr. Edward Holts and a seedily attired stranger, who were deep in conversation at the outer gates, a spot which, I may observe, was not within range of the counting-house windows.

“Hallo ! Holts, what are you doing here ?”

Mr. Holts was too frightened to reply, the wheel of my chaise had rasped his friend down the right leg in a very awkward manner, and had also driven Mr. Holts himself against an iron post, to which he clung tenaciously.

“This is losing time, Mr. Holts,” I said, reining in my horse ; “oblige me by returning to your duties.”

“Yes, Sir—excuse me,” stammered Holts, wriggling out of his perilous position, “but this is an old friend of mine who has suddenly called, Sir, to ask how I am ; he never did such a thing before, upon my word and honour.”

And, looking very white and scared, Mr. Holts ran across the yard into the counting-house.

“Well, Sir,” said I, turning to the friend, “I think you might have selected a more fitting opportunity to intrude upon my premises.”

The friend, who was sidling away in a crab-like fashion, and rubbing his leg vigorously as he proceeded, stopped short, and glanced up at me. There was no mistaking that ugly pock-marked face, though years had passed since it met my own—the face of Mr. Grainger, alias Vauclose, alias Effingham.

“Hope I see you well, Mr. Farley,” said he, with an attempt at perfect ease, which, considering he was an actor by profession, was execrably done, “may I say quite well ?”

“What do you want here ?” I demanded. “Do you know this clerk of mine ?”

“I have—yes, I have a slight knowledge of him—I met him some months ago at a social and harmonic meeting at which I had the honour to be president, and he was kind enough to

lend me seven-and-sixpence. Passing this mill to-day, I called to clear off the obligation—no offence, I hope ? ”

“No, but don’t call again.”

Mr. Grainger scowled, but his voice was still a bland one as he replied—

“I shall *not* call again, Sir. You may depend upon it, Mr. Farley, I shall not trouble these premises with my shadow, ever more. I am sorry to find you so cool towards an old friend, particularly as you have almost that old friend’s sudden and dreadful death to account for—but no matter. No matter either that your friend Mr. Tregancy is *not* too proud to acknowledge my acquaintance, and would not run over me for the world. A poor man wishes you a good-day, Sir.”

Grainger raised his napless hat from his head, and with a peculiar mixture of scowl and smile on his face limped away from the yard.

When I entered the counting-house I found Mr. Holts in a state of considerable agitation, with his head shut in between the leaves of the ledger.

“Mr. Holts.”

“Yes, Sir,” in a muffled voice.

“Will you allow me to suggest that the acquaintance of Mr. Grainger, or whatever his name may be at present, is not a fitting one for Mr. Farley’s clerk, and that Mr. Farley’s clerk might find a better use for his time and his money than expending both in social and harmonic meetings ? ”

Mr. Holts’ head emerged from the book.

“I never went to any meetings, Sir, but prayer meetings, with my mother. I met him in the streets—he—he—oh ! good Lord, I know nothing about him, except—that is—I’m a poor miserable lad, and shall live to see myself hanged ! ”

And with this ignominious but extraordinary peroration, he shut his head in the ledger again, and cried over all the accounts.

I left Mr. Holts to recover himself, after a friendly but significant warning that any further eccentricity of behaviour would probably close his career as junior clerk in my establishment.

Months passed before this incident recurred to me or I gave a second thought to the sudden reappearance of the actor and mountebank whom I had seen for the third time in my life. What changes for me, at my home and around me, before I saw him again !

## CHAPTER IV.

## LOVE AND MADNESS.

WINTER was coming round again. Nearly a year since Uncle Barchard died, and I had started in business for myself—Ellen close on one and twenty. Everything to make home happy—health, wealth, a business increasing every day and a child to dote on—yet no happiness for me or Rhoda. Suspicion had taken a deep hold of my wife's mind, and there was no eradicating it. Her very efforts to keep it in the background, her struggles with her disease lest Ellen should discover it, added to her self-imposed troubles and weighed so heavily upon her brain, that the fear of reason failing her began to grow upon me.

There seemed to be no cure for Rhoda; my protestations had lost their effect, and her suspicions were akin to madness. If I absented myself from home, she said it was to elude her society; if I returned at an early hour, it was for Ellen's sake, and she was more than ever on the watch.

For me there was no rest of mind; when the fatigues of business were over the cares of home began; Rhoda was either melancholy or jealous, and my passions grew less at my command as she became day by day more uncharitable and inconsiderate. There is no object to be gained by the recapitulation of the many quarrels that ensued when Ellen, the innocent cause, had left Rhoda and me together — quarrels which sometimes ended in showers of tears and passionate declarations of her love for me, but more often concluded as they had begun, in a storm of accusations and reproaches.

It had become at last impossible to disguise this discontent from Ellen, and she, ever anxious to enact the peacemaker, did her best to dispel the clouds which lowered over home, and occasionally succeeded so far as to join the hands of husband and wife together, and make a hollow truce between them. Had she known the real cause of Rhoda's troubles her efforts might have been more available, though her own sorrows would not have lessened with the knowledge. But neither of us dared reveal the truth, Rhoda, from pride and shame, and I from fear lest Ellen should leave the shelter of my roof and seek another home. There was no deciphering the riddle,

despite Rhoda's jealous watchfulness of me and my cousin; it was so singular a jealousy too, for she loved Ellen as a sister though she feared her as a rival; loved her Philip none the less though consumed with the torture that his heart beat for another, a younger and fairer than herself. I have said that there was no cure for Rhoda; it was a fierce disease that preyed upon her, an unnatural malady that revolted at reason and believed not in right; John Tregancy and I had changed places, Tregancy was the confidant of her sorrow, one to whom she related every quarrel which took place between us, one who fanned the flame too for the sake of the hatred that he bore me.

When the winter months set in, the gloom over the little household deepened. Rhoda grew thin and pale, and there was in her large black eyes a wavering unsettled look which suggested many cruel thoughts to me, that I prayed might never come true, more for my little child's sake than even for my own.

For weeks her books were abandoned, her fancy-work laid aside, and her favourite pianoforte left untouched. They were weeks of listless inaction, occasionally roused to a slight effort of energy by Ellen, or called to her life and its duties by the sight of her boy. Then a change would occur, the books were reopened, she became very busy at her embroidery-frame, or played for hours at the pianoforte; but inactive or restless, her jealous doubts never slept.

Mr. Creney (to whom by the way Tregancy had obstinately refused to be reconciled) grew seriously alarmed and begged that a physician might be consulted, and Ellen one morning made the same request to me. That was a memorable day, too; John Tregancy had been there the preceding evening, and Rhoda was worse that morning than she had ever been. Ellen and I were alone, for my wife had left the room abruptly.

"I should be sorry to alarm Rhoda by calling in a physician to see her; perhaps there is really no occasion," said I, in answer to my cousin's urgent appeal.

"I am afraid there is a great occasion, Philip."

"Well, it must be a physician, then. The difficulty will be to induce Rhoda to see him. She is very strange."

"I would not ask her to see him," said Ellen mournfully.

"Oh! Ellen, Ellen, do you think that she's going out of her



mind ? I will not believe it ; I have been trying not to believe it since my marriage."

"I pray to God that that affliction may be ever averted from this house, Philip, but it is as well to fear it, lest advice arrive too late."

"A day, an hour, in the fearful mood that now oppresses her, may be too late, you think ?"

"There is something on her mind, and it must be removed at once, if possible."

"I will do all in my power," said I, "all that you advise me; but I do not believe that a physician's prescription will ever cure my wife."

"Hope for the best."

"Ellen, I believe that I have one enemy in the world, whose influence over Rhoda has superseded mine."

"You mean her brother ?"

"Yes."

"You think he sets the wife against her husband, and poisons his sister's mind until the very safety of her reason is endangered ?" she asked, earnestly ; "oh ! call him weak, wilful, passionate, depraved, but not a villain, so unnatural and cruel !"

"He may not think of the danger, but I suspect him."

"What can he say to Rhoda, to affect her thus ?"

"Not a word of truth ; but that matters not to John Tregancy."

"Philip, do you know, I have been wicked enough to suspect him myself."

"When he has called in my absence ?"

"Yes, I suspected him for the first time three weeks ago."

"May I ask what aroused your suspicion ?"

"Rhoda's strange manner after his departure, a manner which alarmed me. Such an abandonment to grief I had never witnessed before. I did my best to pacify her before your return, but it was useless."

"I remember the day," I said, sternly, "and Tregancy will remember *this* one."

"What will you do ?" cried Ellen, turning pale.

"Write to him directly, and forbid him entering my house again. I have hated him for nearly two years, with all my heart, and I have had good reason for it. His reign is over here !"

"Philip, you must consider before you charge him with so

black a crime. There is no proof against him. Consider him and your wife."

"My wife flies to that man for consolation; he stands between us full of evil and I will remove him."

"Philip, you will do nothing rashly."

"I will have no more of it," cried I; "the last lie of Tre-gancy's was uttered yesterday."

Ellen caught me by the arm as I was rushing from the room.

"You must reflect, dear Philip. You are not usually so impetuous; do stay one moment."

"I have reflected long enough."

The door was burst open, and Rhoda, with a death-like face, darted into the room. Her quick flashing eyes embraced our position on the instant, my agitation and eagerness to be gone, and Ellen's earnestness to detain me, as she stood by my side, her hands clinging to my arm.

"And *I* have borne this long enough, Sir, and will be your dupe no more. I have groaned beneath the burden till my brain has rocked with it, and both of you have planned and built your schemes up without mercy—I say *both* of you, Miss Barchard."

Never to be forgotten, that speechless look of horror on the face of Ellen, the wild stare of affright as Rhoda hissed out her cruel words.

"Mrs. Farley, for one day in your life be reasonable," I entreated.

"For one day in your life, Sir," she retorted, "show a spark of honour."

"Ellen, you are trembling," said I; "you must excuse this violence of Mrs. Farley, this strange heat of temper, over which she has no control."

"I ask Miss Barchard to excuse nothing," cried Rhoda; "but I demand of her by what right she stands by my husband's side, clinging to him with that shameful fondness;—is it by right of the heart she has stolen from me?"

"Oh! Philip, Philip, what does she mean?" said Ellen, still trembling violently; "has the blow fallen on her which we both have dreaded, or is this the secret folly that has preyed on her so long?"

She released her hold of my arm and sank into a chair.

"The secret folly, indeed," I murmured.

"You will find me in terrible earnest," said Rhoda, pacing

the room ; " the worm has turned beneath the heel that sought to grind it in the dust."

" Rhoda," I shouted ; " leave the room ! Add to my misery by your madness as it pleases you, but I will not have this girl's innocence wronged by the foulest of suspicions. It wanted but this to make me despise you !"

" My God ! " she gasped.

" Philip, Philip," entreated Ellen ; " remember the weak woman with whom you have to deal."

" Did she remember in her insults, Ellen, that you were helpless, fatherless ? "

" Not insults, Philip ; Rhoda is suffering from excitement ; she means not what she says ; she cannot mean it."

" I can ! " screamed Rhoda.

Ellen's face became of a scarlet hue. She pressed her hands to her bosom a moment, and then flashed back a look of pride and scorn from her dark eyes.

" Ellen Barchard has always lived above suspicion, and will live above it, Mrs. Farley, to the last day of her life."

With an air of calm dignity that was in singular contrast to Rhoda's strange excitement, she slowly crossed the room.

" Ellen," I cried ; " you will not mind her, you will do nothing rashly for your own sake, for the sake of my promise to your father."

With a hand upon the door, Ellen stopped and spoke again.

" I will do nothing, Philip, that my father would not have prompted me to do had he been living this sad day," said she ; " he would have told me that to remain beneath a roof where the faintest whisper of suspicion has been uttered against the fair fame of a woman, is to give a colouring to the slander which time will only deepen. I am going."

" Ellen ! "

" I am going, Philip ; if I had never come, how much better for us all."

The door closed upon her, and I made a rush towards it. Rhoda, with a wild shriek darted before me, and sought to stay my progress.

" You shall not follow her and leave me here," she cried ; " you shall not see her again—let her go ! "

" Let me pass, woman," I said ; " add not to the evil of this hour. She leaves behind a lasting reproach to both of us, and she goes away without a friend. I WILL not have it."

"Philip, you *do* love her—you have loved her from a child, and there was no honour in you when you came to Eaton Square and asked me for your wife. He was right, he was right!"

"Did he, John Tregancy, tell you that?"

"He has been my only friend."

"He has been your curse and mine! Rhoda, let me pass, I am going in search of John Tregancy, now."

"You shall not pass—I have much to say to you—I whom you despise!"

"And I will not hear it."

"You are mad, *mad*, MAD, because I have balked you of your prey!" she cried; "because I have foiled you in the midst of your duplicity, and you fear to lose your love!"

"Do you wish to know the truth, then?" I asked sternly.

"Ay, confess, confess."

Rhoda was right, I was mad at that moment, and recked not of the consequences that might follow the cruellest confession I could make to her—her, so weak too, so near the perilous brink!

"I do not love Ellen now; for a long time I have struggled to crush out of my heart all thought of her, and on the day of my success, you come not to console me by your love in return, but to strew my path with ashes. When there is hope of happiness with wife and child, the wife brings poison in the cup and I drink it to the dregs. Woman, you have blasted your own peace, you have listened to a liar, you have been believing in delusions your whole life. When my heart warmed to you, the mother of my boy, you thought I hated you and loved another; but when I married you I coveted your money, and was alone your lover in your dreams!"

Rhoda held her breath and glared at me. Her face had changed to John Tregancy's—that black, distorted face, full of horror and madness, was not my wife's—it was no woman's face before me.

"Villain!" she gasped.

"Will you let me pass now?"

"Go where you will."

Her hands fell to her side, and she remained motionless till I had passed her. When I stood where Ellen had been standing a few moments since she sank slowly on her knees, and, shuddering violently the while, looked over her shoulder at me, and crouched down more and more. *Oh! that look!*

My rage left me, my heart seemed to stop and the blood in my veins to freeze ; I saw the shadow of the heavy arm which had struck her down on everything. I felt my life and hers were darkened from that hour, and that there would come a day for me when I must answer for the deed.

"Oh ! Rhoda, Rhoda, my wife, my own wife, forgive me ! "

As I rushed forward she sprang to her feet with the yell of a mad woman, and flew towards the window.

"Off, off—he will kill me—murder, murder ! "

My arms were round her, but her strength was past subduing, and she was still struggling towards the window when the white-faced servants, the nursemaid with my child, the affrighted Ellen burst into the room.

"Help, here—assist me to secure her—run for a doctor—oh ! Ellen, look here and see what I have done ! "

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## CHAPTER V

### AFTER THE WRECK.

HEAVY was the blow which had fallen and shattered the household gods. Dark was the veil that had dropped between me and hope, between Rhoda and reason. All was as a night to which there was to come never a morning.

The stricken one lay in her bed, with her burning head tossing to and fro on the pillow, with her eyes, bright with madness, bent on each of us in turn, and knowing not one at her bedside, fearing each an enemy, but fearing her husband above all, and begging the grave physician to hide her from me, even in the deepest dungeon, so she saw not the one who had but hated her so long, and thirsted so long for her blood !

"He will kill me if he stay here ; oh ! take him away ; chain him to the floor ; call some one to help me, and save me from him."

Mr. Farley, I think it would be better to retire," suggested the physician.

I drew back in the shadow of the curtain.

"I will stay, she cannot see me here."

Rhoda became more calm when I was hidden from her sight. Her fears subsided, and she began talking of the past.

"You are right, John, he<sup>1</sup> loves her, I see it in his eyes every day. That is the secret, the secret, the secret, the secret."

She repeated those last words in an under tone for several minutes, then she burst forth again.

"He wishes to keep her here; she is his ward, John. And you believe he still loves her, you *know* he does, and that they are both waiting for my death! Don't laugh, brother, that is very awful! Has that man gone?"

"Yes," answered the physician.

"I will get up then; where's a knife—will some one lend me a knife?"

There was a nurse near Rhoda, and she gently put her hand upon her, and said soothingly, "lie still." Rhoda flung the hand away, and with one of her dreadful screams struggled to rise from the bed. I covered my face, stole out of the room, and went with trembling limbs down stairs.

After a time the physician joined me, and I looked into his face for a glimpse of comfort to my tortured soul.

"She will get over this, Sir—it is a fever, I suppose?"

How anxiously I waited for his answer.

"Mr. Farley, I grieve to say that it is very serious."

"Yes, yes, serious now; of course the sudden shock has affected her mind for a time, but, but—there is hope—there is no danger!"

"Has Mrs. Farley been singular in her demeanour of late?"

"A little—that is all."

"May I ask if any of her family have been afflicted in this way? Her mother, for instance?"

"No, Sir—I believe not. Yet, I have a faint remembrance of hearing that a generation back, or so, there was——"

"Ah! ah! yes, I daresay. Very probable, very probable indeed."

"What can be done for her?"

"I think it necessary for her safety and your own, Mr. Farley, that she should be removed to some *fitter place*, where she can be constantly and more properly attended to."

I groaned.

"I would even suggest to-day—to-morrow at the latest. Men who have devoted a life to the wrecked mind will tell you that a day's delay is often fatal."

"She may be cured, then; you do not think this awful blight is to rest for ever on her mind, Sir?"

"Time, quiet, and care have worked greater cures," he answered; "she is young, too. Yes, I think if she was to go away to-morrow, and be placed in skilful hands, some good might be effected."

"Thank you, Sir; you give me hope."

"Months may work a cure, but still it may be years; hers, I think, is a singular case. Pray, take care of her, and let her not be left for one instant. I will look in again in the course of the day. Good-morning."

The physician departed, and Ellen came into the room to hear what he had said to me. She wept, and wrung her hands, and reproached herself for ever coming to my home, for not seeking more earnestly to elicit the secret of my wife's unhappiness.

"Tregancy has done this; he has sown the seeds of this great ill in the weak mind of his sister," said Ellen; "in her very incoherency she has confessed that. Oh! what will he say now?"

"He will care not; he is past caring for any living creature. Perhaps he will come to exult in the success of his schemes by the bedside of his afflicted sister."

"Hush, hush!" cried Ellen; "he is a bad man, but not so bad as that. He would have parted me and Rhoda, but I do not think at the expense of his poor sister's reason. Oh! that I had told him the truth long ago, and hindered this."

"What truth?"

"This is no time to speak of past follies and deceptions. Tell me of the physician—did he say Rhoda must go away to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"I will stay till to-morrow, then; I cannot leave her and you in this misery."

"Will *you* go away to-morrow, too?"

"I must."

"To be ever alone with the bitter past to mourn over, and the future to recoil at!"

"You will have your boy."

"You must not rashly venture into the midst of strangers, Ellen; I am your guardian, and forbid it."

"I will go to Mrs. Holts' house, and live with her; she will be glad to see me again. You know that I must not stay here, Philip. Think," with a blush, "of poor Rhoda, think what the foolish and the ignorant might say, too, if I remained."

"Be it so—I have brought all on myself—I will bear my own trouble."

"When Rhoda gets better she will see how wrongfully she judged us."

"When she gets better," said I; "yes, and she will get better too, the physician said so; that is something to thank God for. I am not despairing."

To have seen me after Ellen had gone up stairs again, with my head buried in the cushions of the couch, and my face hidden from the accusing daylight, was not to make good the vain assertion that I had uttered.

It must have been hours before a hand touched me on the shoulder, for the sunlight was streaming on the carpet, and I had left it on Rhoda's picture on the wall.

"What, Farley, dreaming! What is the matter here—why have they sent for me in this hurry?"

"Oh! have you come?"

I sat up on the couch, and pushed my hair from my blood-shot eyes.

"Who sent for you, Tregancy? I did not."

"One of the servants took the liberty, I believe. He came rushing to the hotel to tell me that Mrs. Farley had gone mad. What does he mean?"

"What he says."

"One of her old fits of temper, that's all. Creenev and I used to think her raving mad twice a-week, and she was only mad to marry you!"

"Come with me."

I snatched him by his cold, hard hand, and led him up the stairs to Rhoda's room. I pushed open the door, and we entered.

Ellen and two nurses were there. Rhoda was asleep but muttering in her slumbers. There was no more rest for her, waking or sleeping; she seemed ever doomed to the thoughts with which a wrecked brain is tortured.

Tregancy made an effort to withdraw his hand from my clasp, but I held it in a vice.

"Not yet; nearer, nearer, Tregancy; come close to the bedside. Are you frightened of your sister?"

Tregancy did not answer. When I had led him to the side of the bed on which lay my stricken wife, I released his hand.

"Have you seen her with that look before?"



"No," he answered, sullenly.

"Can you look upon her, and tell her husband that your share in the wreck was not a great one?"

"I told her nothing but the truth."

"You lie!"

Tregancy turned to me with his lowering frown, set teeth, and burning eyes, and met a face as stern-looking as his own. Ellen interposed.

"This is no time for brother and husband to quarrel," said she; "better that they knelt at the bedside together, and prayed for the poor sufferer."

"That man pray!" I whispered.

"Hush! she is speaking."

"Philip," whispered Rhoda, in her troubled sleep, "don't leave me again, or John will come and drive me mad. I must not be left any more. There is everything to make us happy, Philip, now, your love and your own boy. Oh! my dear little baby, where is he?"

She half rose in her bed, and then sank down again, crying——

"He has killed him; I saw him kill my child—the only child that God has blessed our marriage with; how could you do it? he was so innocent, he loved me so, John. Oh!" with a scream that woke her to a reality almost as fearful; "hide the bloody hands!"

Tregancy turned pale, as the nurses made a rush towards the bed, as Rhoda's eyes, awful at that moment with the fire of madness in them, were fixed in his direction.

"Don't you know me, Rhoda?" he asked, hoarsely.

"You look like my dead father; have you come for me? oh! mercy, mercy, don't take me away! I am learning to be happy, I have a husband and a baby to live for—don't take me away!"

Tregancy recoiled. His callous heart had braved many evils, and shrunk not at many dreadful scenes; but there is a terror in insanity before which the strongest mind gives way, and Tregancy could not face his sister.

"This is awful," he gasped forth; "I will go down stairs."

He crept out of the room, with his face averted from the struggling figure in the bed, and I followed him down stairs into the room that we had quitted. The door had hardly closed behind me before it was reopened, and Ellen came in, looking

very white, her lips compressed, and her small hands locked together rigidly.

"You are going to quarrel, Philip. Shame on you at this awful time, with God's affliction on this house."

"No, Ellen, not to quarrel, I think," I answered; "but I have two things to tell that man, and then he may go."

"Thank you for the permission," Tregancy said, in a low tone.

"Firstly, Tregancy, may we never meet again, may you never cross that path in life which you have blighted so successfully. Go your way, coward, and take with you the curse of one who hates you—one who would see you starving in the streets, and pass you by!"

"I do not doubt it, Farley," answered Tregancy, between his set teeth; "your day of hate has come, the result of mine will come, too, in its time. You may see me starving in the streets, perhaps, but you shall pass me by, a man more wretched."

"You do not know that."

"I know that the injury you have done me in my life has not yet been repaid, that your misery does not equal that which you have thrust on me, and there is still a debt against you."

"Mr. Farley has never injured you, Sir," said Ellen, still so strangely white, her hands still locked together; "your fancied injuries were born of your own morbid mind, and a vindictive nature has nursed them into wrongs to be avenged."

"Miss Barchard plays the champion admirably, and Mr. Farley should be honoured," said he, bowing; "but Miss Barchard talks of 'fancied injuries,' and Mr. Tregancy must answer that they are real enough. Shall I mention them?"

"Your sister is ill—may be dying, Sir—the time is most unsuitable. It may be also my duty to reply to your assertions, and I would be spared the task to-day."

"This is the last time Mr. Farley and I meet—so *he* says—and I must defend myself. He wronged me by preying on the weak brain of my sister—a mad sister then—and inducing her, by his vile schemes, to marry him, taking her money as his price."

"That money which you coveted," I added.

"Philip, be silent," urged Ellen; "remember!"

"I have another word for Mr. Tregancy," said I; "I have said there were two subjects to——"

Ellen interrupted.

"On the second subject suffer me to speak—justice to myself requires it."

Tregancy looked surprised a moment.

"Has Mr. Tregancy completed his list of wrongs?" asked Ellen.

"No," cried Tregancy, with increasing excitement; "there is a greater injury than robbing me and duping my weak sister, and it can never be repaid. You know it, Miss Barchard; you know it, Philip Farley, well enough!"

"Explain," said Ellen, breathing hard.

Tregancy turned to me.

"You know I asked that girl to be my wife, years since; you did not know, *she* did not know, that 'my idle fancy' was one of the Tregancy passions, which is in its intensity akin to madness."

"While it lasts," I muttered.

"Lasts, man!" he cried; "it has lasted all my life, it has burnt the fiercer for the opposition of your hate and her disdain; it was the one thing to have saved my soul, and there was not even a kind word from man or woman. From the first day that I met you, Miss Barchard," wheeling round to Ellen, "I loved you, but I suspected—rightly enough—who had set his coward's heart on you, and won that return which he so ill-deserved. I made one reckless venture, I grovelled at your feet, and you taunted me with my past life, and shut the door against all hope. You loved him—ay, redden as you will—you loved that hound who stood between me and my better self! When he had shown the meanness of his nature by marrying another for her gold, your woman's heart—your woman's pride—could not throw him off, but you must love him still, and follow him like a dog for his caresses. He had made Rhoda and me his dupes and you had spurned me; why should I let you both be happy, planning for the future, and speculating on my sister's death? why should Rhoda all her life believe that I was wrong in warning her against the man she married, and that there was nothing to distrust in him or you?"

"Have you finished?" said Ellen, hoarsely.

"I told Rhoda everything, my secret and her husband's. I let the light upon her husband's guiltiness, and laid his black heart bare. Rhoda and I had had our full of misery and disappointment; were those who had stabbed us to the death to

have the dagger's point for ever at our breasts? You know my injuries; now let me go!"

Ellen stood between him and the door.

"No, Sir—not yet."

"You have to thank me for the revelation to my sister," he said, savagely; "it has turned her brain, and there is one less to watch you and your lover. Now suffer me to withdraw and leave you in security."

"Silence, wretch!" I cried, advancing, "or the sorrows of this house shall not save you from the liar's chastisement."

A fierce reply was on his tongue, when Ellen, moving nearer to him, touched him on the arm.

"Now hear me."

There was a struggle with her utterance, and once or twice she put her hand to her bosom as if to force the words out, but as she proceeded her voice became firm, almost harsh, with that avowal which hurled back the shame on the head of him who had been so long benighted—on the head of me, too, for both had been deceived.

"You say how well you have read my secret; I say, Mr. Tregancy, how grievously you have been mistaken," began Ellen. "That woman's pride which you have sneered at, makes me utter in defence this day a bitter truth, for you have attributed to me everything that is vile, and I must undeceive you. Now hear. When I first listened to the story of your passion for me, when you knelt at my feet and begged hard for my love, when I told you that you had been reckless and immoral all your life, and no power of mine could make that life a better one, when you offered me your hand and I refused it, I LOVED YOU!"

Tregancy reeled as though a shot had struck him, and, clutching at the back of a chair with his right hand, stood gasping for his breath.

"I loved you then—I prayed that night when you were gone that God might turn your heart and make you good; I prayed for strength to bear a trial which bore me down, and even trusted to some brighter day when I could tell you all and see a future for us both."

"Go on," murmured Tregancy, "you who shut out all hope from me!"

"You saw not hope in my words, but my words would have conveyed it to one less wilful, one not wholly lost," continued Ellen. "I said that your life was wicked and I could not

share it ; a true-hearted man would have sought to lead a new life from that day and appear more worthy in the sight of her he loved, — you grew more stubborn and depraved. I would not risk my future peace of mind for the first asking, or bring sorrow to myself—to my father—to every friend of mine—by marrying one to whom repentance was a scoff. I struggled with myself, convinced at last that it was a foolish dream to think that any power of mine could subdue the evil in your heart, and so I loved on hopelessly. I still remembered you, Tregancy, that second time you gave way to the impulse of the hour, but I had lost all trust in you, and was trying to forget.”

“Ellen, Ellen, say that you have not forgotten me now—that the faintest spark but lives, and let my devotion fan it to a flame ! ”

“Mr. Tregancy *has* forgotten the incidents of the last year,” said Ellen, coldly ; “forgotten all the calumnies, taunts, and evil snares that have turned his sister’s brain.”

“All based on a great error.”

“They have proved to me your true nature, and I thank God for my escape—thank Him, too, that my girlish folly has wholly died away, and that Mr. John Tregancy has not even my respect.”

“Not even your respect,” he muttered to himself.

“I can but repeat my cousin’s wish—may we never meet again, Sir.”

“You loved me once, you say. That remembrance shall at least save you from meeting me again, rest assured, Miss Barchard. As for you,” facing me, with his hands clenched, “I have a revenge to take, and I will sleep not till the day comes. You have poisoned her mind against me, and have helped to steel her in her cruel resolutions—beware of me ! ”

“Your threats affect me not, Sir.”

“The day shall come, so help me God !—I swear it.”

“Mr. Tregancy,” said I, pointing to the door, “your way lies there.”

Tregancy slightly bowed to Ellen, and then, with his dark face full of evil, went out of the room. I heard the street door close noisily behind him.

“Have I done right, Philip ? ” she asked.

“Yes.”

“I thought my confession would never have to be spoken, much less to him, but time brings strange things to pass.”

"Ah! strange indeed."

"What a good man he might have been—what a bad man he is!"

"Do you mourn over what he might have been, Ellen?"

"We all ought to mourn over the wreck of a fellow creature. But—hark!"

The voice of Rhoda, in wild entreaty, welled to where we stood, and reminded us of the terrible present, from which the events of the last half hour had distracted us.

Ellen went up stairs, and I drew my chair before the fire and sat staring at the burning coal. The long evening passed, the long, sleepless night succeeded, the cold grey morning dawned, and the hour came for Rhoda to go away—to leave husband, home and child, for the dread asylum that keeps the unfortunate from contact with the outer world, and leaves them to that new world of fancy which their sad malady creates.

No more of this—no need to dwell upon the heaviest blow that had befallen my young life, and crushed the spirit out of me. A stealing up the stairs, assassin-like—a scuffling down them with my poor shrieking wife—and all was over! She had gone, and I was left in the house which her money had bought.

To be left alone! For Ellen was going away that afternoon.

"Do you know that I am one and twenty to-day, cousin?" said she, before she left me to my solitude.

"I had forgotten it. Ah! one and twenty! My best wishes, cousin."

"Thank you."

"I shall have to give an account of my stewardship—my guardianship, shortly."

"When you are more resigned, Philip, to this affliction," said she. "Pray, do not trouble yourself about me yet awhile."

"Very well," said I, listlessly.

"I am going now. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Ellen. How strange the place will be to me from this time. Two days ago, Rhoda and you—to-night, alone!—for ever alone!"

"Not for ever alone, for Rhoda will get well again; the physician gives us hope. Not alone now, Philip."

"Yes."

Ellen touched the bell, and at the signal the nurse entered

with my boy. She placed him in Ellen's hands and left the room. Ellen came close to my side, and the child, with a bright smile, leaned forward and tried to struggle from her arms.

"Not alone, Philip !"

"God bless you, Ellen, ever a comforter. No, not alone."

I clasped the child to my heaving breast, and he clung to me and looked up, still smiling in my face. And while I sat there with my boy, and while a father's tears rained on him, Ellen stole away.

END OF THE SIXTH BOOK.

## BOOK VII.

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“No wind blow fair yet? No return of monies,  
Letters, nor anything to hold my hopes up?  
Why, then, 'tis destined that I fall, fall miserably,  
My credit I was built on, sinking with me.”

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

“Then, you have made an end of your tale, Gammer?”

PEELE'S “*Old Wive's Tale*.”



## CHAPTER I.

## PROFIT AND—LOSS.

Six months more. A bright season, foretelling a grand harvest, a season of sunshine, gentle showers and winds from the west—lovers of nature and lovers of business to whom nature brings money congratulating themselves on the splendid summer before them, the former thinking of their pleasures and the latter of their pockets.

It was the end of June. I and my child and the servants had still the house at Hammersmith to ourselves, the faces of the well-known were on the walls of my room, but the rooms were deserted and the well-known were scattered.

Rhoda was better I was assured—every day I went to see her I was told of her mental progress, and of the hopes of her recovery. Still I feared the days of home were never to come back, as week after week passed by and I saw but little change in her myself. Painful visits to that asylum were they, for they afforded me no consolation; I could not believe in any promises, looking into those wild black eyes that never flashed with recognition. Her malady had changed, the fits of raving passion had left her after the first few weeks of her restraint, but the awful depression which succeeded and continued, and from which nothing could arouse her, was as fearful to me and gave me as little encouragement to think of better days, as on that fatal morning when the blow fell.

Still they told me, and they were learned men, that a few more months would witness great improvement, and that the gates of her gay prison-house,—for the prison was gay in its disguise of flowers, pictures, books and music—would be thrown back and Rhoda would be free. But I had grown a stern, moody man, whose mind could take no light impressions, who looked on hope as vanity, and thought that there was no comfort in the world. I had begun to think that I was suffering for my sin, and that the retribution had fallen on my life, and was to last while life endured. I had played the liar and the mercenary, at a time when youth in

general is free from one mercenary thought; I had set my soul on money and had gained it with a wife, and now the value of the prize was striking home to me. I had given up happiness for gold, and gold had brought a curse with it!

If by a word I could have cast ten years aside and gone back to my humble boyhood, in that baker's shop in Bethnal Green, I would have uttered it, and begun life again with a purer mind to guide me.

I sought oblivion in the prosecution of my business, I slaved day and night at figures (lest my mind left unoccupied an instant should dwell too much on Rhoda,) and trade and money increased as my reward. But a lucky stroke on the market which brought me in a thousand pounds, or a mistake that lost it, was received with the same stolid indifference. I worked hard to forget the past, though I set no value in storing for the future, save for my boy's sake. Ah! my boy, despite my discontent, the weight upon my mind, the sternness which had hardened me and was hardening me still, the little trust I placed in God or prayer to alleviate the calamity under which I laboured, I never forgot *him*. I was living for him alone—there is no life utterly dark, I found, and my boy kept me from despairing. I shudder as I think now, if that boy had died in the midst of my affliction, at the time when he was the one faint light upon my darksome path—if I had lost ALL!

Yet my nature had so altered that I was not truly thankful for the blessing! I was gloomy and morose, I shunned even the baby face at times, I became a hard man to deal with in business, a man with no mercy for those who fell in my debt, and with no thanks to those who helped me on to prosperity.

Notwithstanding my good fortune, I had become less considerate, I had embarked in larger speculations, ventured more on the chances of success, caring not always to be on the safe side now money was further from my heart. Still everything went well with me, and the excitement of speculation kept my mind at work. I dared not sit still and think of a desolate home.

Unsettled, eager for any change that would bring fresh thoughts to me, I began to have dreams of a certain large mill and wharf, not a stone's throw from Mr. Crawley's in Thames Street, the purchase of which would absorb four-fifths of my capital. It was a venturesome thought, for I was still young to the trade and my footing was hardly secure; but the novelty pleased me, and the excitement of bargaining was

the loadstone to lure me on. In steadier times — by-gone times !—I should have thought any man mad not to leave well alone—but I had gained confidence in myself and believed that nothing could sink me.

“If the mill succeed not,” I reasoned, “it can be once more disposed of, and I can go back the way I have come, and begin again less ambitiously. If I lose twelve thousand pounds—say fifteen—there will be enough remaining to content me and my boy, and enough, people say, is as good as a feast,—and IF I double my fortune, why so much the better for father and son !”

Still I paused, and thought that it was just possible I might follow my Uncle Barchard to ruin. Richer men and wiser men had toppled from their pedestals ; why should I stand more than they ? I went to see Rhoda ; that day she seemed better, and I hesitated—I went a second time, she was worse, and I wrote off at once to the owner of the new mills and made him an offer, which after some consideration was respectfully declined.

Charley Esden ventured to dissuade me from my project.

“I do not say that the new mill will fail, Mr. Philip, for you are doing a great trade, want more room, and have been very fortunate, but still there is a risk.”

“Nothing is done without risk.”

“That was not your maxim once, Mr. Philip.”

“True,” I answered ; “but I have learned better. All millers are, more or less, gamesters, and the excitement of the play makes me double my stake.”

“It is a mill that has always paid,” said Charley ; “but if I were in your place, Philip, I would wait a few years.”

“No, I have set my heart on the mill, I shall make another bid for it—I am sure it will succeed. The first expense got over and what is to stand in the way of success, Charley ?”

“I don’t know,” said Charley ; “I suppose I am superstitious, but I wish that mill had never entered your head.”

“Do you remember the character that was ascribed to me years ago, Charley ?”

Charley with a little surprise answered in the affirmative.

“That character has wholly changed,” I said ; “I was considered a cold-blooded stoic, who disturbed not himself with mean troubles, and could bear great ones with composure. The last six months, Charley, have made me querulous and impatient with the slightest obstacles in my way.”

"The last six months would have tried Job himself," said Charley; "but your mind only requires a little rest."

"No, it requires more action. I want more to think of, I want fresh cares upon my mind, and obstacles of trade for ever in my way — then, Charley, I shall forget the rest of my troubles."

Charley Esden had his thoughts apart from the corn trade and the bakers' accounts too, he was still fostering his hopes of making Ellen Barchard his wife. He had seen more of Ellen since she had settled down in a little home of her own and had taken Mrs. Holts for companion, and to see Ellen often was a dangerous pleasure—even for a man of business. One excuse or another afforded him a pretext to call; he went with young Holts to "*see the old lady*" very often; he went with me now and then, to pay his respects to Miss Barchard. Now and then, — for there was a painful reminiscence which had placed a restraint on me and my cousin, and to meet was to awaken every association and open afresh every wound.

I should have called less often had it not been for Charley's sake; but I had become interested in him and his love-story, and had set aside my old jealous selfishness. My interest in Ellen was strong too, and unlike that which I had had a year ago, it was the interest of a brother for a dearly-loved sister. There remained no longer a turmoil at the heart and the brain such as twelve months since had arisen at the sight of her; if there had been one thought for her, one faint, weak thought on that day she told the secret of her life to John Tregancy, that confession had killed it. All the foolish vanity I had once hugged to my breast was eradicated, though my concern for her happiness had not become less in proportion.

Ellen was alone—had only her cousin for a friend, and but a weak, nervous old woman for a companion. She was as ignorant of the world and its evils as a child, and had once loved John Tregancy!

That last fact haunted me; perhaps she still loved him despite all his crimes and his follies, and kept her heart whole for his sake. I knew only one man in the world fit to be trusted with so precious a prize as Ellen Barchard, and that man had loved her from a boy. If she could but forget the past and love him in return, what a fair end to the story!

But though I finally discovered that Tregancy's last action had alienated him for ever from Ellen's heart, yet there was no turning to another, however worthy and good he might be. There are flowers that transplant, but there are flowers whose roots cling to the primeval soil, and if we move them they wither.

Charley came late one evening to my house at Hammer-smith, to wind up the day's business. He sat before me with his order-book, and prosed over its contents, and passed the money-bags to my side of the table in a cool methodical manner. After the accounts were concluded, and the money secured in an iron safe, Charley put his order-book in his pocket and said with a heavy sigh—

"I have made the plunge, Mr. Philip. It is all over !"

I knew what he meant the moment that I glanced at his face.

"Is it indeed, Charley ?"

"What a folly of mine to think it could have ended otherwise," said he, with another sigh ; "why was I to be more happy than anybody else, or what should she see in me to take a fancy to ? Nonsense, all of it ; eh, Mr. Philip ?"

"I do not see the nonsense of it," I remarked.

"Poor girl, how I frightened her by my protestations—how she cried—how kind she was, too, in her endeavours to soften the pain of her refusal, when she saw I was terribly in earnest. Heigho ! the house of Esden is governed by an unlucky star, and not one of its members will ever shake hands with good fortune."

"I regret to hear of your disappointment, Charley."

"A disappointment from which I shall never recover."

"Miss Barchard may alter her mind, Charley."

"Never, Phil, never. She did not hesitate one instant, but, kindly and resolutely let me learn that pursuit was unavailing and that the devotion of a life would not change her. Well, I must be an old bachelor, my good mother at home always told me that I was cut out for one. I was of a different opinion once, when I had in my mind's eye such a fancy picture, such a castle in the air, such thoughts of being a doting husband, and father, and grandfather, when the years had rolled over my head and sprinkled it with snow. That picture, Philip, has fallen from the wall, and that castle in the air has gone the way of all 'baseles fabrics of a dream,' and here I am on the hard earth again !"

"None the worse for your fall, Charley."

"I trust not," he answered, hoarsely. "I should be a cowardly fool to turn reckless, and a great ass to grow maudlin, because my career has been checked in its greatest ambition. I hope to be just as good a man for business—just as able to see after your slippery customers as heretofore. I don't see why my every-day life should interfere with a life on which my every-day thoughts have never intruded."

I thought of John Tregancy and *his* resolutions when the sting of disappointment had fixed itself deep, and the contrast between him and Charley Esden brought out my steady matter-of-fact friend in the brightest of colours.

But Charley was a brave man, and brave men shine forth when the heart's strength is tested.

"Most people talk of forgetting everything when they experience a disappointment like mine," continued Charley; "I don't understand that. I think keeping Ellen in remembrance will make me a better man. I do not esteem her the less because she cannot fancy me for a husband—that's a very poor love that turns to hate when the word 'No' is spoken."

"It is no love at all."

"You are right enough there," said he; "and I trust Ellen Barchard will not set me down for one of the weak sort of mortals. She hopes that I will forget her. Forget her, Phil!—not exactly. I shall think of her every day, though you will never hear me utter her name from this night."

Charley marched away, very proud yet very down-hearted, strong in his powers to endure the force of the blow which had fallen on all that his fancy had cherished. I think that he was shrewder, and steadier, from that day, took more interest in my labour, and laboured himself in real earnest, making no sign of that loss from which he had suffered. Yet his was a passion stronger than Tregancy's, more deep and lasting than mine, truer than that which makes the fashionable hero of so many fine novels.

## CHAPTER II

## SEPARATION.

WHILST I speculated and made money, the mill in Thames Street, on which I had set my covetous eyes, still remained unsold, the owner of the property stubbornly keeping to his price, and thinking offer after offer of my own beneath its value. We came to terms at last ; the agreement was drawn up and signed ; I was to take possession of the property four months from the date on which the bargain was concluded and become a great miller instead of a small one.

A deeper study of business from that day forth, my thoughts of trade intruded on but for a little while of an evening when I held my boy in my arms before the nurse carried him to bed, and once a-week diverted for a longer period from Mark Lane and millering by a painful visit to the home of my mad wife.

Suddenly, as the doctors had foretold, there came a change ; a gradual softening of the scared look upon her face, a glimpse of reason now and then flashing to her brain, a partial recognition of me, a slow abatement of her imaginary fears. I could scarce believe in the change at first, still less have faith in its endurance ; it did not seem possible that week after week should witness an increase of health and strength, until there were brighter days to hope for.

The heavy burden that had weighed me down, at last felt lighter ; I walked with freer step, found courage to think of Rhoda and the cruel past, could even fancy that at some distant date my wife would take her old place at my side, and commence a happier life. I began to have a return of my old cautious thoughts, too, to hope that I had not been precipitate in the purchase of the new mill, and to wish sometimes that I had waited till my years were older. But my chief thought was of my wife, when every week brought some good news to gladden me. All that she had suffered stung me as deeply as before, but the remembrance of it seemed to warm my heart towards her.

There came a memorable day when the clouds drifted further back and let a flood of sunlight on my life. The day she knew me for her husband, remembered all the past, and wept over it

in my arms, the day she asked to see her baby—"would I next time bring little Philip with me?"

Little Philip and his nurse went to see her next time, Mr. Creeney next;—to have seen the old gentleman dance round Rhoda an extempore hornpipe and wring his hands with delight, was a spectacle to do the heart good,—and last of all went Ellen.

Rhoda was well enough then to colour at the reminiscences which my cousin's presence conjured up, to say—

"I am waking from a troubled dream, Ellen. It does not seem possible—that part wherein I—no matter, no matter. I shall be free again soon," clapping her hands together rapturously; "I shall go home, and we will begin life once more, with no follies to torment us."

"I hope the worst troubles of your life have vanished, Rhoda," said Ellen.

"And John—where is John?—*he* never comes to see me."

Ellen looked at me, and neither of us answered.

"Not dead!" with a scream of alarm that startled us with fears of a terrible relapse.

"No, Rhoda; well, I believe, very well in health," I hastened to reply; "I have not seen him lately."

"I had forgotten. Ah! he told me to distrust you, Philip; that was very cruel."

"Don't dwell upon it, Rhoda," I replied; "there will be time enough for explanations in the days to come."

"But Ellen!"

"Ellen has an explanation for you also, Rhoda," said my cousin.

"Have you told John everything? for he was certain that you and Philip—oh! my brain is very weak yet, I cannot think of that!"

Rhoda appearing to become excited, I suggested a termination of the interview, and shortly after, Ellen and I went away, both counting the hours when my wife would be restored to home.

And how eagerly I counted too, for a great change had come over my heart, and its influence was still working there. I was beginning to love my wife. She had suffered so much, and I had been the cause—her very affection for me had been perverted by Tregancy, and been the means of driving her mad; she had always loved me, and in her return to reason that love showed no diminution. There was



hope of happiness then ; after all, I thought, the right would come round and the wrong sink for ever, the darkness disperse, and the daylight gladden Rhoda and me ! We should be a quiet, grave couple, perhaps, but misfortune would have drawn us together, and, with trust in each other for the future, what was there to fear ?

One month before the new mill was to be made over to me Rhoda was pronounced cured, and the day was fixed for her departure. On that day I had a conference, of some length, with Dr.—, whilst Rhoda, with a glad heart, was taking her farewells. Mr. Creeney, who had insisted on accompanying me that day, was standing by the window, laughing to himself, and rubbing his hands vigorously together.

“I really believe this is the *very* happiest day of my life,” he had said a moment since ; “to think the poor girl is absolutely well again—going back again ! I should very much like to give three cheers ; do you think that it would alarm the establishment ?”

“I am afraid it would.”

“Ah ! I suppose they are excitable here. Dear me ! this is a day I shall never forget. Going back again !”

Mr. Creeney had retired to the window on the physician’s entrance, leaving me to converse with that man whose skill, gentleness and care had saved many benighted minds from shipwreck.

“She will require care, of course,” said he, “and humouring. Whatever she desires, I trust you will assent to, if it be possible.”

“Every wish shall be attended to.”

“I would suggest at once an immediate change of air and scene—a tour on the continent, for instance.”

“I am afraid my business will not allow of that.”

“But mine will !” cried Mr. Creeney, wheeling round with sudden velocity. “I have nothing to do, and if I can be of use for a year or two, pray let me have the chance. You can trust her with me, Mr. Farley, and I’ll take her anywhere and everywhere—to the North Pole if it only will do her good, and keep her head cool.”

“I have had a dull home for ten months, Mr. Creeney,” I replied, “and it would be hard to see it remain desolate for perhaps that length of time again. Still, let Rhoda decide when we reach our home—it rests with her.”

Half an hour afterwards we had turned our backs on the

asylum; and were rattling homewards in a close carriage—Rhoda by my side, very pale and thoughtful, and troubled every ten minutes by Mr. Creeney shaking hands with her.

"Where are we going?" she asked, after a long silence.

"Home."

"Home—Hammersmith?"

"Yes."

"I would rather go to Mr. Creeney's house, Philip; I *must* go home with him if he will have me."

Mr. Creeney looked at me.

I thought of the physician's last instructions, and answered:

"I will return alone, if you desire it, Rhoda."

She laid her thin white hand on mine, and looked into my face with a forced smile.

"Don't think that this is the freak of a moment, or of a mind still unsettled, Philip. I have thought of this for weeks. I believe that it will be so much the best for both of us."

"Best to forsake me, Rhoda!"

"Best to hide my home and my child from me for a while, lest they bring back the past too vividly, and turn my brain once more. Oh! Philip, not to stand in that room again, and hear," with a strong shudder, "the avowal of your hate!"

"God forgive that false avowal, Rhoda; I trust you have forgiven it."

"Yes; but it has separated us for a long, long time, mayhap for ever. You will be better without me, Philip, and I shall be more at peace if I but see you and my boy occasionally. I shall not torture you with my jealousy, my doubts,—torture myself too, cruelly."

"Has Ellen told you all?"

"Yes, and I am happier. But I am not strong yet, and I fancy a separation of some years will work good for both. I could not return to that home again—never again."

"Let me change it."

"We will change it if we live—and my determination changes also."

"But I have been looking forward to this day, Rhoda, and praying for it. I have changed in myself, and have great hopes now that you and I are to be blessed with peace, and comforted by each other's love."

"Each other's!"

"Yes."

"You were a money-worshipper when you married me, you

said—how those words returned to me, when God brought me back to life ! ”

“ I know that money will never give me happiness, and that only you can gladden home henceforth.”

“ Not Ellen ? ” said she, faintly.

“ Not Ellen.”

“ Philip, dear, I have another reason that keeps me from your home, and that may ever keep me from a share in it.”

“ And that ? ”

“ Must remain a secret—a close, close secret. Sometimes for your sake, I pray I may not relate it till my dying hour ; sometimes, for my own, I hope the day may not be distant. There, there, it sets my brain whirling to talk too long on painful subjects. Let me be silent now.”

“ What does it all mean ? ” exclaimed Mr. Greeney, bursting with curiosity ; “ love Ellen—money—secrets ! ”

“ It is a long story.”

A flash of comprehension seemed to dawn on Mr. Greeney's mind, which set him speculating for ten minutes, after which time he went through a complicated pantomimic action, when Rhoda was too deep in reverie to notice him, intending to convey encouragement to me to leave the cure to time. He concluded his illustrations by flinging up his arms and puffing violently at nothing ; a piece of dumb show, expressive of the rapidity with which my troubles were to be blown away.

I saw Rhoda to the house of Mr. Greeney, a pretty cottage residence about a mile and a-half from my own, and left her there. I saw no persuasion of mine could shake her resolution, for that time at least, and I was too careful of the instructions that I had received to seek to thwart her slightest wish. I went back to my home, and found it less solitary despite my disappointment, for Rhoda was recovering, and that knowledge lightened everything around me.

I called every day to see Rhoda at Mr. Greeney's, and to find her fixed in her determination to remain there. I found that she still dwelt on that secret which I had attributed to a slight mental weakness, and that she was still in doubt whether the day would ever come for the revelation of it.

These visits to Rhoda reminded me of my past courting days, and her improvement in mind and body tended to reconcile me to her absence from my home. She was almost happy at Mr. Greeney's,—quite happy when her child was brought to see her.

Her saddest times were when she thought of her brother,

feared that his silence boded no good to me, and mourned over the evil he had wrought in the past.

These sorrowful reveries interfering with her complete recovery, Mr. Greeney began once more to suggest the expediency of travel, offering to take charge of Rhoda and form her escort, for as long a time as she or I might desire. I consented reluctantly to this arrangement, buoyed up by the anticipation of her complete restoration to health, and trusting to time to change that strange resolution which kept us asunder.

There was great difficulty in persuading Rhoda to leave England, but the project was finally agreed to, and every preparation for departure was soon made and concluded.

When the day came for our separation, and when servants and lady's maid and courier were awaiting orders, one of those heavy fits of depression, from which I had lately been free, settled on me again. Then I discovered how in the last few months Rhoda had won upon me, how her new-born gentleness, and the evidence of her strong affection, even in her weakness, had brought peace to my mind. Knowing, then, how I should miss her, I became full of despondency.

It was the hour to say good-bye. Rhoda was to part from me and her child at Mr. Greeney's house—at her own desire I had consented to part with her there, lest her weakness should overpower her at the railway station and unnerve her in the midst of strangers.

"I wish you would ask me to accompany you, Rhoda?" said I, reproachfully.

"What, and neglect your business, that business which is the idol of your life?"

"Mr. Esden would manage it for a few weeks, well enough."

"Not so well as the master. Besides, I have to keep a promise to myself."

"Ah! that foolish secret again."

"I shall try hard to keep that promise, Philip, though my own happiness stand in the way."

"Is not that folly, Rhoda?"

"Perhaps so. God knows, I may not be quite right in my head yet," with a sickly smile; "but still there is 'method in my madness.'"

"I hope we shan't miss the train," suggested Mr. Greeney.

"You will write to me, Philip,—let me know all about your business and what money you are making—I shall be interested more than you think."

"They were not favourite topics of yours, Rhoda, once upon a time."

"No ; but I shall be interested in them now. And," she added, "write to me of our—*your* home, of little Philip, too," her voice began to falter ; "ah ! little Philip, let me see him."

The child was on her knees a moment afterwards, his tiny hands dragging at her bonnet-strings. Rhoda clasped him tightly in her arms, and smothered him with kisses.

"Dear baby, if he was only going with me !"

"Will you take him ?" said I, faintly.

Rhoda looked at me with her earnest eyes.

"Shall I ?"

"He will be a comfort to you, a companion—you have a mother's right to take him, and I will not say 'No.'"

"You are alone—have lost your wife—I will not rob you of your son Philip. He will be happier," with a sigh, "with his father, he will be safer too, for I am not fit to be trusted with him yet."

The tears began to drop.

"How often I shall think of him when the sea rolls between us, Philip, and how often I shall pray for him !"

She bowed her head over him as she strained him to her bosom, and was silent several moments. Mr. Creeney and I, both conscious of the mother's whispered prayers, did not intrude upon her reverie.

"There," putting him down with another heavy sigh ; "I leave him in good hands. If—*if*—I should never see him again, Philip, tell him of his mother when he grows a big boy—tell him how his mother loved him !"

She rose, and flung herself with her old impulsiveness into my arms.

"Good-bye, Philip ; I did intend to part with you as a friend, not as a wife ; but I cannot act coldly in this hour of separation. If I return I will be more staid, more matronly ; but now—for this once—I will be the Rhoda that I used to be, before you told me that you loved me for my money."

"Oh ! Rhoda—that reproach in these last moments !"

"Is it a reproach ?"

"Think of me as you did on our wedding-day. You have a right, Rhoda. I would rather part with all the world than you."

"Say that again."

I repeated it, and she murmured—

"I will try and believe it—I shall go away all the happier in that persuasion, longing for the day to come when that which keeps me from your home is gone."

"I will wait and hope, then."

"Don't say that—you know not what you are saying!"

"Ah! Rhoda, you are not trying to believe that I am a true husband."

"Well, well—I will try, there! And now," straining me closer in her trembling arms, "good-bye, again. Don't forget to write to me, to tell me of my boy, of Ellen, of my brother even, if you hear of him, and lastly of your business. God bless you, Philip; I hope you will be happy."

She hastily pressed her hot lips to mine, broke suddenly from my embrace, and flying towards her child again, caught him in her arms, and sobbed violently over him.

"Good-bye, my boy; I regret you are not old enough to cry for me, and be sorry that I am going. God bless you, child, husband—both of you! I am going now. Take me to the carriage, some one, or my heart will fail me."

She clung to my arm when I had reached her side, and moved with me from the room, Mr. Creeney following. I supported her faltering steps to the carriage, and assisted her within it.

"It is better for me—for my mind, too—to go away," she said; "I feel that. Another good-bye, Philip—the last."

"Take care of her, Mr. Creeney."

"Have I taken care of her for nearly thirteen years to be lacking in prudence now?" cried he. "Good-bye, Mr. Farley; rest assured you leave her in good hands. When we come back again you will hardly know us, Philip; we shall have improved so. When we come back again, I shall bring something for my godchild that will very much astonish him—smuggle some very expensive lace, perhaps, to make him a cocked hat with. When we come back, we shall find you the richest miller in Mark Lane, eh? Well, good-bye. I wonder how many more good-byes everybody is going to say!"

"When we come back again," murmured Rhoda. "Ah! take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself!"

Holy words that teach us the folly of building up what a breath may destroy, that warn us in our boldness, and check us in our pride and rash conceit, how solemnly they sounded in the hour of our parting!

## CHAPTER III.

## FOREBODINGS.

TIME moved his way onwards, waiting for no man, sweeping down with his terrible scythe all that stood in his path and was marked for the harvest; the young and the old, the good and the evil, sending the rich and the poor in their turns to the wall, and bringing good luck and bad luck in his train. I heard from Mr. Greeney once a week, at times more often, and his favourable news recompensed me for my loneliness. Rhoda was visibly improving—Mr. Greeney had not remembered her so well for years, each day witnessed the strengthening of her mind—the change was working miracles. She never wrote herself—to all my letters, full of news of home and of that business in which she had taken so sudden an interest, there never came a direct reply; Mr. Greeney always answered for her. “Rhoda’s love, and Rhoda said this and that,” but Rhoda would not write herself, it was part of the secret that kept her pen from replying.

The month came round in which the mill was to be made over to me—a month of bustle, toil and preparation. The premises were given up, and the labour of removal from Chelsea to Thames Street, of stock, waggons, and effects, occupied several days. There were alterations to make, new plans to adopt, and Charley and I worked day and night to get all in right train before Christmas. There being signs of an increase of prices in the future, I ventured to make heavy purchases and to fill my large warehouses, which were only second to Mr. Crawley’s, with grain. I did nothing rashly, however; I saw clearly enough that the large sum expended would return again in its time, and though the account at my bankers’ ran low, yet I had my money’s worth in my mill.

Charley and I were not the only hardworkers; Mr. Hedger and Mr. Holts exerted themselves to their utmost, and Ike Boxham ran about the yard in a frantic manner from morning till nightfall, carrying enormous weights, and trying very hard to be in fifty different places at once, an ubiquitous feat in which he never succeeded.

With all our exertions it was nine days in the new year

before everything was in fair order, and Charley and I could look each other in the face and take breath.

"I say, Charley, we shall soon want Frank to help us," said I; "what a glorious time that will be for the three of us!"

"Frank is waiting for that day, although, poor old chap, he pretends not to be waiting for anything. He has been very dejected lately; but I have told him of my own disappointment, and as he finds that he has less to despond at than I, he takes example by his cold-hearted brother, and bears up like a Briton."

"No news of Annie Tackeridge, Charley?"

"Not a scrap of information; I think they must have left the country, though it will not do to tell brother Frank so; but I am detaining you."

"I can always spare a few minutes to talk of my friends."

"We have a busy day before us," said Charley, buttoning his coat, and setting his hat firmly on his head, "and every minute is a tiny diamond. This won't do, Mr. Philip, there's Richmond for you, and Croydon for me, and Mark Lane for us both before two o'clock, and I do not exactly see how we are to manage it all."

"Are the chaises ready?"

"Quite; and there are other matters which require attention, Mr. Philip, and they must not be left to lie in idleness. There's that contract for the new engines, no one's paying attention to it, and there's the fire insurance, have you renewed it?"

"It's all right. The fifteen days' grace does not expire till to-day."

"I have my doubts of that fifteen days' grace. However, I'll call at the office in the course of the morning," said Charley, "it's not much out of my way. What is the number of the policy?"

Charley having obtained the necessary information, started on his journey, and five minutes afterwards I had followed his example.

It was a hard day's work for me, a fast drive round the country, a scampering to the Corn Exchange, and a struggle for orders with a mob of millers; a smart stroke of business on the steps, and in the gutters outside, after the market-gates were banged against the money-changers; another drive along London streets to collect debts from town-bakers, and add a few more scores of sacks to the order-list from indepen-



dent tradesmen who had not troubled Mark Lane that afternoon.

I did not reach the mill till eight in the evening. Messrs. Hedger and Holts, the latter gentleman in an extremely nervous state, were awaiting my arrival in the counting-house. I had seen nothing of Charles Esden, during the day, and as he had not made his appearance on the Corn Exchange, I concluded that a pressure of business had detained him from the market.

"Has not Mr. Esden returned yet?" said I, as I entered the counting-house.

"I'm very sorry to tell you, Mr. Farley," said Mr. Hedger, "that Mr. Esden has been thrown out of his chaise."

"When—where—how long a time since?" I ejaculated.

"We received the news at the mill by half-past three o'clock."

"Is he hurt seriously?"

"There's no danger, Sir," replied Mr. Hedger; "a broken arm, and a few bruises about the head, but nothing serious, I believe."

"Where is he?"

"At his own house. He sent word that you were not to disturb yourself about him to-night, Sir, and that his brother would look in the first thing to-morrow morning."

"I will go at once."

"The horse has come home rather damaged, Sir."

"Has it?" said I, absently.

"Mr. Esden sent a fire insurance letter, and some money, with directions for me or Mr. Holts to start to the office at once, as the business was important."

"I ran all the way, Sir!" cried Holts, in an excited manner, "but the office was closed when I got there; oh! dear, I'm very sorry, Sir; I'm very, very sorry."

"Never mind, put the money in the safe; I'll go to-morrow myself!" I cried, as I ran out of the counting-house. Dismissing my boy for the night, I jumped into the chaise, and in a very short space of time had reached Mr. Esden's house in the Dover Road. Kitty, the servant maid, with a face of considerable length, admitted me.

"How is Mr. Charles, Kitty?"

Before she could reply Frank Esden made his appearance in the passage.

"Is that you, Mr. Philip?—come in, come in—we have

the jolly miller up stairs in your old room ; he is not much hurt, but we were afraid of his shaking himself to pieces by walking up too many stairs."

I followed Frank up stairs into my old quarters, where I found Charley propped up carefully in bed. Charley's arm was in splints, and Charley's head certainly looked none the better for falling on it. Mr. Esden and his wife stood wistfully gazing at their damaged Boy.

"A sad accident, Mr. Philip," said the father ; "but thank Heaven, it might have been worse. A sad accident."

"My dear Boy," whimpered Mrs. Esden, "it might have been his death. You must promise, Charley, never to go in a chaise again, for your poor mother's sake."

Charley smiled.

"That's the way they keep going on, Mr. Philip," said he ; "and it's such a trifle after all."

"A trifle !" cried his indignant father.

"Come, clear out here," said Frank, unceremoniously ; "now, dad, just take your white head down stairs, and follow suit, mother, there's a dear woman. Why can't you keep out?"

"And do you feel better—not quite so much pain, Charley?" asked his anxious father.

"Oh! ever so much better," answered Charley.

"There, you hear that, father?" said Frank ; and now *do* go, for it's enough to drive an invalid out of his mind, bobbing in and out like this, and not allowing him a moment's rest."

"Why don't you bob out yourself, then?" said the father, half angrily, as he proceeded to retire.

"Oh! I'm going to sit up with him," said Frank ; "he's inclined to be a trifle feverish, and it's not likely that *I* shall leave him."

Mr. and Mrs. Esden took a reluctant departure, and Frank locked the door behind them.

"That's the best way," said he, putting the key into his pocket ; "it's kind of them, but it must excite Charley, and the doctor said that he was to keep particularly quiet."

"It don't excite me in the least."

"Do leave off talking," said Frank, "I mean to tell Philip all about it, and so you keep your mouth shut. Come to the fire here, and you, Sir, if you don't try to go to sleep I'll fling something at you."

Charley shut his eyes to appease his brother's wrath, and Frank led me by the button-hole of my coat to the fireside.

Frank, in a low tone, entered into a hurried explanation of how Charley and the boy had been thrown out of the chaise in the London streets, how the boy had escaped, and Charley been carried insensible into the first doctor's, how it was discovered that his arm was broken, and his head not in the soundest condition.

"I forgot the fire insurance office till past three o'clock," said Charley; "my fall had knocked it out of my head; but I sent off to the mill directly I thought of it. I hope it's all right?"

"It's right enough, Charley."

Charley was not satisfied with my evasive answer.

"Did Holts or Hedger get the policy renewed?"

"I believe Holts found the office closed, but I will go myself the first thing in the morning."

"Not insured yet," said Charley, petulantly; "not insured after all!"

"What is the good of bothering about that insurance?" cried Frank; "can't you go to sleep, and be quiet. Is the mill to catch fire because it remains a few hours uninsured?"

"I hope not; but if it should catch fire."

"If!" cried Frank, in the most contemptuous manner.

"The workmen keep late hours there, and are not the most careful people with their lights—such a thing might happen—and then!"

"My dear Charley," said I; "I am not afraid of so extraordinary a coincidence—the chances are too much in my favour to frighten me. I renewed my insurance on the Chelsea mill two days after the right time last year, and we were not burnt out in consequence."

"I wish we were on the safe side," said Charley, still harping on the theme; "if anything happens, it will be my fault. I ought to have insured first of all."

"It's very extraordinary that you cannot be quiet," snubbed Frank; "you'll only make yourself ill."

"Come, Charley," said I, "I will satisfy you and myself too; I'll go back to the mill, and have a look at it, before I start for Hammersmith. Will that ease your mind?"

"It will make you very late home, Mr. Philip," said he.

"There's no one sitting up for me, except the stable-boy,"

replied I, with a suppressed sigh; "and half an hour will make no difference."

I rose to go at once.

"I hope to be sufficiently well in a week, to take my place in the chaise and let the boy drive me the rounds," said Charley; "and Frank will act as substitute till my name is scratched off the sick-list."

"I thought that would surprise you," said Frank; "it did old Crawley, when I asked his permission this afternoon. However, he gave it, and so with a little extra labour, I shall take your customers and my own to-morrow, Mr. Philip; rather a curious berth of mine, a sort of self-acting opposition."

"I am very sorry to put you to all this trouble, Frank, I really think——"

"I really think you had better say no more about it, Philip," interrupted Frank; "for it is all settled, and I shall be at your mills at the usual time."

After wishing Charley a speedy cure and making my adieux in the back parlour to Mr. and Mrs. Esden, who were as anxious to know how their Boy was as if they had not heard for a week, I stood with Frank at the street door exchanging a few words before departure.

"I hope poor old Charley will soon be on his legs again," said Frank; "I think he will, for it was not a very serious pitch-out. Thank you, Philip, for calling to-night, and thank you for promising to go round to the mill; that has satisfied him and will keep him quiet till the morning. And—hallo!" looking over his shoulder, "there's the governor creeping up stairs again, to ask about Charley's arm and head, and here goes to turn him out of the room. Good-night, Phil."

Frank ran back to the bed-room, and, getting into my chaise, I drove off towards Thames Street, to fulfil the promise I had made my nervous agent.

It was nearly ten o'clock before I reached the mill, and found a man to take charge of my horse and chaise. Opening a small door in the great gate by means of a private key I passed through, closed it after me, and walked with a quick step towards the centre of the paved yard. All was dark and desolate, the workmen had left, the empty waggons were standing about the yard, there was nothing stirring in that mass of building which loomed out from the black background of a starless sky. Not a light to be seen, all safe, all

quiet ; so quiet that I could hear at regular intervals the low washing of the tide against the wharf, and the strange far-off murmur of a wakeful city.

After the bustle of the day, the long weary drive, the excitement of business on Mark Lane, and the anxiety I had felt concerning Charley Esden, I found the stillness of my mill-yard a relief, and stood enjoying it for a moment. It was the first time I had been alone that day, and I did not hasten off the premises after my conviction of security ; but put my hands in my pocket in an easy attitude and took another look round the mill-yard.

Suddenly, my complacency and self-possession received a shock ; for immediately behind me I heard a quick grating noise, a noise such as a person in heavy boots would have made by unexpectedly slipping on the stones. I turned and looked straight before me—there was something huddled against the wall in the distance, and it bore a strong resemblance to the figure of a man. I advanced cautiously towards it. It moved when I was within ten paces of its hiding-place, and made a rush towards me. I sprang aside to elude the force of the attack, and the figure dashed by me, staggered, recovered, and, snorting forcibly, prepared for another rush in my direction.

“What do you want here ?” I demanded, ready to grapple with the intruder at his next attack, and to raise the echoes of Thames Street for further assistance to secure him.

At the sound of my voice the man paused, put his hands in his pockets, and came with a well-known slouching gait towards me.

“Lor ! is that you, Mr. Farley ? why, whoever would have thought of seeing you here, Sir, at this time of night ? I was uncommonly near knocking you down, Sir, and falling on you.”

“What do you want here, Boxham ?”

“Why, I ain’t easy in my mind to-night, Sir ; there’s something not exactly right somewhere about, and I’m blest if I can get to the bottom of it.”

“Indeed,” said I, astonished at this second victim to a nervous attack, similar in character to that of Charley Esden’s, “what has given rise to your suspicions, Ike ?”

“Why, I’ll just tell you, Sir ; look’ee here, there’s been a cove hanging about the place ever since it’s been dark this evening. Once I caught him right in the yard, looking round

him as if he wanted to steal something—and I'm not quite certain he wasn't arter the sacks now—and an hour arter that, he was dodging about the other side of the way, up and down, as if he was waiting for somebody, which he wasn't."

"Can you describe the man's appearance?"

"Well, I think I should know him again, tallish and skinny-ish, if there is such a word, Sir, and if there isn't I beg your pardon."

"Could you see his face?"

"Yes, Sir, and a precious ugly face it was."

"And was his manner singular enough to arouse your suspicions?"

"Look'ee here, Sir; when you came at eight o'clock and drove away agin directly I was in the chaise-house, finishing up a bit before going home to Sall."

"Who's Sall?"

"Mrs. Boxham, Sir; I always call her Sall."

"Well, well, be quick, Ike; I have to go to Hammersmith. There's St. Paul's striking ten."

"And I'm blest, Sir, if somebody's head did not look in at the door, and bob away agin when I turned round. This made me curious, Sir, and I spelt it over going home, and just as I got the knocker in my hand, I thought I'd come all the way back agin, for I wasn't at all satisfied. And I comed back agin and I've been round everywhere, and the mill's locked up all right and the counting-house doors fastened, and I was going away quite satisfied when I suddenly heerd a noise, and so I crept along by the wall there and"—with a stentorian burst of laughter that set the echoes ringing and made me jump a little, "ho! ho! I caught you, Sir!"

"Then you feel satisfied now, Boxham?"

"Well," scratching his head vigorously; "that man meant something, and I'm darned if I am quite easy now."

Ike, after looking round the yard for some one to catch, said—

"And might I ask, guv'nor, what brought *you* here?"

"I thought I would look in before my return home, and see if the lights were out, and all the men gone. What time does the engine-man come to-morrow?"

"Four in the morning, Sir."

"And there's a watchman paid to go the rounds of this wharf and the adjoining premises every hour; the place is safe

enough. And next week, when the horses are here, we shall have a watchman all to ourselves. Good-night, Ike. Don't stop any longer, I have not the slightest fear."

"I wish we were going to have a whacking dog instead of a watchman, Sir. The watchman gets into the public houses, and gets talking to the policeman, and gets drunk like one o'clock, I know him; but a dog, oh! wouldn't he walk into their legs when they came slipping over the gates!"

"Well, Ike, we will have a 'whacking dog' as well."

"Thank'ee, Sir," said he, as he walked by my side to the gates; "and I'll take him under my own care, Sir, if you have no objection."

"Certainly not."

"And you think it's quite right here, Sir? for I don't mind stopping an hour or two longer—all night for the matter o' that."

"Yes, all right enough, Ike; if the place is robbed there is not much money in the counting-house safe."

We passed into Thames Street once more, and I locked the gate carefully behind me.

"Which way are you going, Ike?" asked I, as I mounted into my chaise.

"Blackfriars Bridge way, Sir."

"Jump up! I can give you a lift on your journey."

I could see Ike blush by the light of the lamp glimmering at the corner of the next street.

"No, no, thank'ee, Sir," said he sheepishly, "I'd rather not, Sir. You're very kind, and p'raps nobody would see me, but I shouldn't—much—like."

"Then you will not get up?"

"N—n—no, Sir, thank'ee," he repeated.

"Well, good-night, Boxham. Many thanks for your care of my new establishment. I shall have to tell you of a rise in salary shortly. Good-night."

Ike Boxham reiterated my good-night. I drove away, thinking of the signs and warnings of the last few hours, and occasionally experiencing Ike Boxham's sensation of not feeling quite easy in the mind, which sensation gradually subsided as I approached Hammersmith and home.

## CHAPTER IV.

### R U I N .

IN the early morning, when the church clocks were striking two; when the darkness of the night had not departed, and the night's children had not all gone home; when sober men were quickening their pace, and thinking of the wife or mother sitting up; when men, whose wives or mothers were not objects of consideration, were still at dancing-rooms, and flash saloons, and places worse than either; when a strange world of vice was keeping holiday, whilst virtue slept or prayed for loved ones to come home; when the stern policemen were looking suspiciously at stragglers in the streets, and the streets were full of echoes, a cry of "FIRE," startled outward, homeward bound and homeless, woke up the slumbers, and, by its magic word, filled the London highways with hurrying mobs of people.

When the red flames began to mount above the house-tops, and gables, chimneys, factory-shafts, and steeples, to start forth in dark relief against the fiery background; when the clouds turned into crimson canopies that Lyons could not equal; when men, at suburban turnpikes, were asking of policemen and late cabmen "where the fire was?" and getting speculative answers, a messenger of evil thundered at my door and roused the neighbourhood.

My window was flung up on the instant.

"Who's there, below? What is it?"

"If you please, Mr. Farley, will you get up. The mill's on fire."

"The mill in Thames Street?"

"Yes, Sir."

The servants and the nursemaid were beginning to stir in their rooms, when I cried out—

"Keep in your beds. It is nothing that concerns you. Don't leave the house. I am going out."

I was soon dressed, and standing in the Hammersmith Road, by the side of the messenger and the night cab that had brought him to my house.

"Who sent you to me?"

"Mr. Frank Esden, Sir."



"And the mill—MY mill—is on fire?"

"Yes, Sir, and burning furiously."

"Strange—awfully strange!"

One glance at the red sky in the distance, then I was in the cab, and rattling London-wards. The surprise, the dread nature of the intelligence so suddenly conveyed, the time of night, the haste with which I had dressed, the glaring sky ahead of me, all added to an excitement which I exerted myself vainly to subdue.

"I must think of this coolly—with some of my old dispassionate thought," I muttered; "there may be ruin beneath those ominous clouds; but I must not face it like a child. Drive faster, man," leaning out of the cab, "and there's a guinea for you."

"All right, Sir."

Kensington turnpike, and the toll-keeper's face peering in at the window.

"Toll, please, Sir."

I tendered him a piece of silver, and received some halfpence in return.

"A bad fire, Sir," observed the man.

"Yes, very."

The change fell from my nerveless hand into the muddy road, and as the man stooped to pick it up, I cried out—

"Drive on—don't wait. Drive on there!"

Through Kensington, Knightsbridge, down Piccadilly, at Charing Cross, along the Strand and Fleet Street, where the crowd was gathering and talking noisily, as it streamed on towards the burning mill. I had collected myself at last—had resolved to look the very worst in the face, and not shrink back with horror.

The mob grew denser at the corner of Thames Street, and I was compelled to dismount, and force my way along as the crowd pushed, struggled, and fought, in its eagerness, to reach the scene of attraction. A broad, dazzling light, the noise of engines pumping on the flames, a myriad of white upturned faces, a host of policemen with their staves keeping back the people, a wall of human beings that stood before me, arresting further progress.

"Now then, you, Sir," bawled a man in a corduroy suit, as he twisted himself half-round, to expostulate indignantly; "where are you shoving to? You can't get by here; you've

got as good a place as any of us, what's the good of kicking ? ”

“ Let me pass, there's a good man.”

“ That's uncommonly likely—that is. Now just keep back,” he shouted, as I persisted in my efforts ; “ or I'm blowed if I'll stand it ! ”

“ I must get by here—I am the owner of the mill—my name is Farley, let me pass.”

The man twisted his head further round on his shoulders in the effort to get a good look at me, and see if my appearance warranted the assertion.

“ You don't mean that,” he ejaculated ; “ here—ahoy—clear the way there—where's a policeman ?—clear away a moment and let Mr. Farley pass. It's Mr. Farley, the master.”

An agitation amidst the crowd in front of me, an endeavour to form a passage through the living wall, a repetition of my name on every lip, and a sudden curiosity in everybody to catch a glimpse of me. The news of my arrival spread, a policeman came to my assistance from the inner ring, and with hundreds of faces looking into mine—hundreds of eager looks and staring eyes, such as I had afterwards in many fevered dreams, I forced my way along.

“ Quick as you can, Sir—this way, Sir—move aside there ; keep back.”

Dragged through the mob at last, and standing ankle-deep in water, along with the policemen, firemen, and a few interested beings, with the crowd of eager sight-seers swaying at the back. The gates of the yard, through which I had passed a few hours since, were open, and the mill beyond was on fire from top to bottom, and the roaring flames were leaping towards heaven. I saw at once that there was no hope for the mill, and that no power could save it—that the temple of ambition I had reared would be a blackened mass in a few more hours, and all the scheming, bartering, struggling of a life, would sink within its ruins. One spasm of the heart, a long drawn breath, a compression of the lips, and then I gazed at the fire with eyes undimmed, and saw my fortune burn away.

“ Philip ! ”

“ Frank ! ”

We stood in the great, bright firelight, and held each other's hands a moment, with that strong, fervent clasp which only true friends in affliction interchange.

"My dear old Phil, I hope this does not break your heart ? "

"Do I look broken-hearted, Frank ? "

"It almost breaks my own," said he, releasing my hand, "to see that blazing ruin, to know what loss it brings to you, and to feel, by a strange chapter of accidents, that my poor brother Charley is the cause."

"Not he, not he," said I, quickly ; "I hope he will not let that thought torture him for one instant, or believe I blame him in the least degree. Is he aware of this ? "

"I left him asleep, and in ignorance. It will be dreadful news to tell him."

"Keep it from him then."

"If he should wake up, and see my father in the room, he will have his suspicions that something has gone wrong. He will hear the noises in the streets too, and the cries of fire outside the house."

"He will not think of the mill, and your father will not enlighten him."

"When I heard the people running past, Philip, when I opened the street-door, and saw the glaring red sky before me, I thought in an instant 'Philip's mill !' Charley will think the same."

"Does this fire strike you, Frank, as a most remarkable event ? "

Frank stared at me, before he answered, "It is more than remarkable."

"A strange coincidence ? "

"Strange indeed, Phil. Oh ! if Charley had paid that insurance before his accident — if Holts had made more haste——"

"—That mill would not have been on fire, much less the funeral pile of Philip Farley's fortune," I concluded.

"What do you mean ? " inquired Frank ; "you don't believe the mill has been set on fire ; for Heaven's sake don't say that, Phil ? "

"As sure as you and I are standing here, I am the victim of foul play."

"What enemy so vile ? what devil so black ? "

"Time will show," I answered.

"Philip, don't judge too hastily—this may be one of those singular coincidences that occur once in a hundred years, and you, by God's will, are the sufferer this time."

"I have said, 'Time will show,'" said I, doggedly; "I will wait for that time patiently, and say no more. How the mill blazes, look!"

The ravening flames were leaping higher at the sky—darting at it a wild sea of fire, and breaking into spray which drifted with the wind, and threatened further mischief. Frank and I stood side by side, and watched the conflagration. There was nothing to be done but watch and suffer; even the efforts of the black-helmeted figures, that passed and repassed the sheets of flames, and seemed at times to be walking in their midst, were unavailing. A few questions were asked me from time to time by gentlemen of the fire brigade, and gentlemen of the press, and I replied to them with a composure that astonished Frank and my inquirers. Frank was certainly more excited than I, for as the flames devoured their prey, and the mill burned for a moment with a greater fury, Frank leaped, groaned, tugged at his hair, and more than once ran several yards towards the ruin, as if to join the firemen, or take the management out of their hands.

Mr. Crawley, whose anxiety for his own premises had brought him to Upper Thames Street, came towards me and Frank, and was lavish in his sympathy. A sympathy as genuine as most strangers indulge in, perhaps of a quality superior, for I had been his servant in old times, and my quickness at accounts had won his admiration. Mr. Crawley was a narrow-minded, but not a bad-hearted man, and he could afford a few shakes of the head, a wringing of his hands, and a sentimental expression or two, in which the adjectives 'sad' and 'shocking' frequently occurred. His mill was standing, and he had arrived post-haste from his estate at Norwood to find everything safe and the wind blowing in the very direction that he could wish; his mind was easy, and he could moralise and offer consolation, begging me not to despair, and entreating me to take a warning from my loss, and wait till I was older and wiser before I set up in business for myself again. 'Would I think of it too?' he said, 'his mill was open to me, there was room for another collector, and I should not grumble at the salary.' Mr. Crawley was desirous of adding my 'connection' to his own, perhaps, but still the offer was a kind one, and I thanked him for it, and promised to consider it, adding, in defence, that I could not take my mill in flames as an impressive warning, or as a proof of rashness in my business; it was a blow that might have found the wisest

unprepared, and it was my lot to receive it instead of Mr. Crawley.

When the roof fell in, and the thrill of horror and admiration—strange words to run in couple—vibrated through the thousands near me, I touched Frank's arm.

"That will do, Frank; I have seen the worst, and can do nothing here to make it better. I am going home."

"I don't see myself what good's to be done by stopping here," said Frank, ruefully; "yet I should like to see the end of it."

"It is a pretty sight."

"Why, Phil, you do not think——," began Frank, in amazement.

"Forgive me, old friend; one is inclined to bitterness after witnessing a scene like this, and I am not quite myself for all my stoicism."

"What is to be done to-morrow?"

"Nothing."

"But the orders?"

"Those received must be attended to next week, and I shall seek no fresh ones, Frank. The reign is over, and Philip the First abdicates."

"Philip the First is not faint-hearted — has not lost his courage, I know."

"Had I the means I would begin to-morrow," I answered; "but it will take my last penny, Frank, to pay my debts, and rebuild the mill after the conditions of the lease, and then—the world's before me where to choose!"

"But there are friends on Mark Lane to help you, Phil."

"I will have no man's help," said I firmly; "and will risk no man's money but my own. Come, Frank."

"Oh! Charley, Charley," muttered Frank.

We passed the engines, at which the men were working hard—a host of volunteers, at whose united labours the destroying fire still mocked.

"Look there, Phil, amongst the men at the pumps, another friend working for the lost cause."

"I looked in the direction indicated by Frank Esden, and saw, working with an energy that was very uncharacteristic, my junior clerk, young Holts. Struck by his excitement, and his extraordinary and unwonted exertions, Frank and I paused a moment.

"Can that be Holts?"

"Yes, the fellow who used to sleep over the account-books, and cry if the clerks joked him—there was spirit in him after all, you see. Look at him—he's going out of his mind."

Frank might well imagine that, to see Holts urging on the men, shouting and jumping in a frantic manner, his long, light hair, from which his hat had fallen off, streaming behind him, his wild-looking eyes half starting from their sockets. In the middle of a muddy pool of water, at his feet, were a coat and waistcoat, evidently his property, and far beneath his notice.

A man in his shirt sleeves rushed forwards from the crowd, whilst we stood observing Mr. Holts.

"Is that you, Sir?" cried Boxham; "is that you? Oh! Lord," dancing before me in a savage fashion; "what a night this here is, and what a sight that 'ere is! Look at the mill; I knowed something was wrong; I knowed it this arternoon. Somebody's done it! somebody's done it!"

Tears were rapidly coursing down Ike Boxham's red-hot cheeks, as he leaped right and left, and splashed himself and his listeners with mud.

"And I'll find it out too, I can tell you!" cried Ike; "and they shan't have the laugh against us long; and oh! I am so sorry; and oh! I hope you won't grieve too much about it, Mr. Farley. Ow—w—w!"

"Grieving will do no good, Boxham."

"Nor more will pumping, and nor more will nothing. I have been at them ingins all night, and I'm going in agin in a minute. It would make a blessed corpse work to see that fire. Just look at Mr. Holts there, Sir; who would have thought of him coming to slave away like that? Oh! Master Farley, do keep up, Sir; come and have a turn at the ingen, Sir, it'll cheer you up a bit—I know it will!"

"There is no help for the mill," said I; "there is nothing to be saved."

Ike cried more loudly in reply, executed a third dance before me and Frank, and then darted back to his place.

"That work at the pumps would just suit me," said Frank; "I am unsettled; I want something to do. Here goes for a turn!"

"Nonsense—you have Crawley's work to do to-morrow—come home, Frank."

But getting home was the problem to be solved—the crowd was not thinking of retiring whilst there remained so large a bonfire in Thames Street to amuse it, and to work a

passage through thousands of obstinate people was a difficulty not easily surmountable. However, by dint of skilful management we made slow progress through the mass, and at about half-past four in the morning were enabled to breathe freely.

There was another friend to startle us with his presence before we separated; Charley Esden himself, haggard, and gaunt, and death-like, with his arm in splints, and the empty coat-sleeve hanging at his back. He came marching round the corner of a street at a rapid pace, and would have passed us by unconsciously had not Frank shouted out his name.

"Charley, you mad fellow!" cried his brother, as he seized him by his uninjured arm; "just come home. You don't go any further; I have got you fast."

"Frank—Philip—ah! it is true then; it is the mill! Let me go, Frank, I must see it."

"Charley," I adjured, "for my sake, as well as your own, go back with Frank."

"I will see the worst," said Charley, still frowning at his brother, as he made an ineffectual struggle to release his arm.

"It's no good," said Frank, holding on tenaciously; "two arms to one, and you don't move another step, old boy."

"I will see the worst," repeated Charley.

"Surely to know the worst is sufficient, Charley, without risking the resetting of your arm — perhaps risking your life," I said.

"Well!" said Charley, desisting from further opposition, "the worst then, Mr. Philip?"

"The worst is, that the mill is burning to the ground, and there is not the shadow of a chance to save it from annihilation."

"The place is uninsured," groaned Charley, "and I have been the agent of your ruin."

"Do not think that, Charley, or you add another care to me," I answered; "what has happened was not to be prepared against; if any one be to blame it is I, for neglecting the insurance to the very last hour; had it been renewed the British public would have been spared the exhibition of this night."

"Philip believes the place has been set on fire," explained Frank.

Charley shook his head.

"No one so base—no one with sufficient motive to commit the crime. Philip Farley has been too good a master to make any of his servants enemies."

"I did not say a servant set the mill on fire," I answered ; "but enough of this, I am tired of the subject. To-morrow may clear up the mystery, and till the time comes, why perplex ourselves ? And now, Charley, go home ; you have done a very foolish thing in coming forth to-night."

"If I could only see the fire an instant," said Charley ; "see if there is yet a chance to save the place."

"Not one," replied his brother.

"It is not *very* late."

"Only half-past four," said Frank, "and if you stand here till half-past twelve, I shan't leave go. 'See the fire,' indeed ! how would you get through the crowd with that broken arm ?"

"Well enough. Leave go my coat sleeve, do."

"Not till you are in Dover Road."

Charley gave up with a frown.

"I am in your hands, brother, if you are really determined to keep me away from Thames Street."

"I am," was the firm reply.

"Then you may as well take me to the hospital, or a surgeon's, Frank, for my arm is once more broken. I had to fight my way here with a host of people in as great a hurry as myself, and those who jostled against me soon did for this maimed limb."

"Oh ! Charley, Charley, what a fellow !"

"I could not stop at home, believing there was danger to the mill. I did not care for danger to myself. Were the books saved from the counting-house, Philip ?"

"I do not know—it is possible," replied I ; "come on with him, Frank, let us walk one on each side and keep him from further contact with the crowd. As for a cab, there does not seem a chance of one."

So, with the murmuring of a thousand voices in our ears, with the red sky over head, and flame and smoke and drifting sparks still seen above the housetops, the three most interested in the fortunes of the burning mill, turned their backs upon the ruin and went another way.



## CHAPTER V

## MOTHER AND SON.

AFTER Charley Esden's arm had been reset—during which operation Charley fainted twice but never groaned,—and I had taken leave of the brothers and returned to Hammersmith, it was seven in the morning—my hour for beginning the business of the day. But I was weary, and there was no work to put my hand to on the instant; my head ached, my limbs were full of pains, and I was glad to go straight to my room, lock the door and fling myself, dressed as I was, upon the bed, where I slept till midday.

I woke up unrefreshed; the excitement was over, the knowledge of the change that was before me in the days to come was pressing heavier on me, the sense of the desperate battle in the future to save my name and credit was becoming more insupportable.

Still it was not my nature to give way; I had borne a greater misfortune in the affliction of my wife—the present trouble was heavy, but not like that one, for there would be no self-reproach to embitter the afterwards! wealth had brought me no content. I had even been unhappy in the possession of it—let me look the future boldly in the face then, and start once more in life with hope and youth's energy to back me.

But Rhoda, whose fortune I had lost, and my boy, whose prospects I had blighted; those were the thoughts to keep me down and crush me—to stare me in the face and teach me to despair. Nevertheless, I was calm; I had resolved that no one should say of me I held up my head in prosperity, and sank when adversity laid its burden upon me—that I was only a brave man when the sun of my fortunes was high in the heavens.

I sat before my late, untasted breakfast, and thought of these things, thought of Rhoda too, and if it were possible to keep the news from her till a few more weeks or months had given her strength to bear the shock. Rhoda seldom took up a newspaper, there was less chance in France or Germany of an English journal falling in her way; she would travel on in false security, growing stronger daily, and her husband

would endure his troubles alone — a just punishment, and better on his shoulders than his wife's. Still Mr. Creeney, mixing with English travellers, reading the English papers, when foreign censorship allowed him, might hear of my misfortune, and in the excitement of the moment make it known to Rhoda, therefore I penned a hasty note of caution and communication, feigning to consider my loss in part recoverable, and speaking with a confidence that I was far from feeling.

Business set in in the afternoon ; gentlemen connected with the fire-brigade and the police force called on me with the books and papers rescued from the counting-house, expressed regret to hear the premises were uninsured, and dropped mysterious hints as to the origin of the accident, that confirmed me in my own grave doubts. I had nothing to communicate in return, did not even mention Ike Boxham's suspicions on the night before the fire broke out, but sullen and resigned, kept my secrets to myself. When I was alone I opened my books, took up my pen and set to work on a balance-sheet, in which the balance for once in my life was to turn all the wrong way. A rough draft of the state of affairs, soon convinced me there was nothing to build upon, and that after my debts were cancelled and the mill, according to the conditions of my lease, re-erected, I should be as poor in purse as when I was Uncle Barchard's boy at seven shillings a-week. There was a chance of the lease being taken off my hands by a speculative miller ; there was a probability of getting on too, if I chose to feign myself still a man of capital, and regard my loss as trifling. But the corn-market was in a fluctuating state, it was a bad time to begin afresh, and I was not knave enough to venture other people's money on the poor chance of recovering a little of my own. The truth should be known, that Philip Farley was no longer in a position to take his stand on the Corn Exchange—that the last new miller in Mark Lane was the first to break down, and to retire with bowed head from the lists in which he had thought to gain riches. This resolution arrived at, I wrote to my old master, Mr. Crawley, and at once accepted the situation he had offered me ; after which I drew my chair to the fire and began to reflect on my home, and the preparations requisite to change it for one of less pretension.

Reflecting thus, when visitors were announced—my cousin Ellen and her grim attendant, Mrs. Holts.

Mrs. Holts dropped into a chair near the door, and Ellen Barchard ran towards me, and put both her hands in mine.

"My dear cousin Philip," she said earnestly; "I could not rest until I had seen you and heard the worst. Will you tell me all—tell me that the hundred reports about you are unworthy of belief?"

"Do they talk of me already, Ellen?" asked I, as I released her hands.

"Every newspaper has some foolish story of your ruin, even of your derangement and suicide."

"Derangement and suicide, Ellen," said I, "may be classed amongst the fabulous reports—don't you think so?"

"You are jesting," said she, with visible impatience; "oh! tell me the truth, every word of the truth, Philip."

"The premises are uninsured, cousin."

"And you are ruined!"

"I have lost that fortune which was my wife's inheritance," I replied; "and have to start afresh and make a fortune for myself. I can bear the loss and begin again with courage."

"I am glad to hear it," sadly answered Ellen; "I did not expect to find you prostrate, even if the story of your loss was true. I knew too well the strong mind of my cousin."

"Thank you for the compliment, Ellen," I said; "but I am afraid that mind will need support. If Rhoda and my little boy were not to suffer with me, I could wage war with a stouter heart."

"The thoughts of Rhoda and your little boy will nerve your arm to strike a surer blow."

"No, they will cover me with remorse, for I have dragged wife and child to poverty."

"Not poverty, Philip!"

"Well, I will not say poverty, I may ward off a few tax-gatherer's extortions, and pay my quarterly bills out of my *clerk's* salary; but there will be a great difference between my next home and this one, and that difference will effect Rhoda, whose days of affluence began when she was in her cradle."

"Will affect her for the better, perhaps," said Ellen; "those who know our sex will tell you that misfortune brings out in a true woman many virtues which days of prosperity keep hidden."

"Ever with a cheering word, Ellen, and ever thinking for the best,"

"You will think for the best, Philip?"

"Yes—I am trying now—I was trying when you entered."

"You will succeed, Mr. Farley," asserted Mrs. Holts, from her remote position.

"Pray accept my apologies, Mrs. Holts, for omitting to thank you for this kind visit."

"I don't require apologies," she answered, rather bluntly; "you have your business to think of without noticing a poor old woman like me. I said, 'you will succeed, Sir.'"

"I shall not fail for want of exertion."

"Troubles such as yours will be forgotten, when troubles such as mine are still afflicting me; yours is a case that affects the mind, and time will cure it; mine is of the heart, and a deep trouble of the heart lasts while life lasts."

"True," I answered, thinking of my wife.

Mrs. Holts was depressed in spirits that morning.

"I shall find many of my friends drop off now, Ellen," I remarked, anxious to turn the conversation.

"Those not worth the keeping," said Ellen; "there is one knowledge we arrive at in adversity, cousin, we tell our friends from enemies."

"Some friends rallied round me last night," I said; "and though their efforts were unavailing, still their presence was a comfort to me."

"You mean Edward for one," said Mrs. Holts, becoming interested in the subject; "I knew that he would serve you well; he promised me he would, he took his oath — ahem! ahem! — he is so good and quiet when there is no one to cross him and perplex him. Low-spirited and nervous like his mother, perhaps, but a very good young man."

"I saw him working at the fire-engines," I said.

"He worked till he dropped. I have left him this morning, Mr. Farley, on a sick bed. I return to watch him after I have seen Ellen to her home."

"I am sorry to hear that he is suffering from his exertions in my cause," I said.

"He is very ill," replied the doting mother, "but he bears up well; he is very patient. The poor boy was delirious when I was sent for first, Sir; he talked of nothing but the fire and the insurance."

"Ah! the insurance," I said; "does *that* trouble him?"

"Why should it trouble him?" asked Mrs. Holts, sharply looking up.

"One of the unfortunate and innocent causes that led to the catastrophe," said I, "was Edward Holts."

"He never told me that," exclaimed Mrs. Holts, surprised. "Will Mr. Farley be good enough to explain? Ellen," in an excited manner, "he never said a word about it to his mother!"

"He has scarcely had time," I answered.

"The story—the story!"

"My story is a short one, Mrs. Holts," said I; "I sent Mr. Esden to renew the insurance, and Mr. Esden was thrown from his chaise that day and seriously injured."

Ellen changed colour, but made no comment.

"When Mr. Esden had recovered from his fall," I continued, "he sent word to the mills for one of the clerks to go instantly to the insurance office. Your son started, Mrs. Holts, but unfortunately arrived too late."

"It was to be," murmured Mrs. Holts; "but why did he, who has no secrets from me—not one secret now!—keep me in the dark?"

"I am sure there is no occasion, Mrs. Holts, for this excitement," said Ellen.

"There is—there is!" she contradicted; "it looks false, and it has made my heart heavier since I have sat here. But he has been good—and steady—I cannot believe anything wrong of him. Mr. Farley?"

"Madam."

"Have you deceived me, too? You promised to keep a watch; to tell me instantly if any strange manner of my son's should strike you. Have you at any time—oh! good Lord, I see it in your face! Oh, Mr. Farley, Mr. Farley, you did not know how much hung upon your neglected promise!"

Mrs. Holts rocked herself in her chair and moaned. I hastened to explain.

"One incident which I had forgotten strikes me as you speak. The serious events that followed it, and were fatal to my peace, have effaced it from my memory till this day."

"Tell me!" gasped forth the old lady; "don't let me lose a single word!"

Briefly as possible I related the particulars of that afternoon, mentioned in a preceding chapter, wherein the lives of Mr. Holts and Mr. Grainger, *alias* Vauclose, were nearly sacrificed to my furious driving. I alluded to the agitation of young Holts during the slight dialogue which followed in the counting-

house, and Mrs. Holts, with a hand on each knee, sat and listened eagerly.

"If I had known this before, he should not have remained another day in your employ," she muttered.

"It was a trifling fault, and I should not have blamed Mr. Holts for it, had not a previous knowledge of that Mr. Grainger made me pretty well acquainted with his character."

"Was he a tall man?"

"Yes."

"Round shoulders, black eyes, about fifty years of age, marked thickly with small-pox?" she asked, with great volubility.

"The same."

"Had he been an actor—conjurer—quack—concert-singer—everything that is low and vile?" exclaimed she, with the same rapidity of utterance.

"I believe he has adopted all those professions at one time or another of his life."

"You were acquainted with him, you say, Mr. Farley," said she; "did you quarrel with him—does he bear you an ill-will?"

"I never quarrelled with him."

"I will sift to the bottom of this," said she, starting up. "I have an awful thought burning into my brain, and it must be followed to the end. Come, Ellen, let us go; each minute is valuable to me—to Mr. Farley. Sir, you may hear from me again."

Mrs. Holts' face wore a strange look of decision, and her usual nervous demeanour had entirely disappeared.

"I have said that you may hear from me again, but I pray you never may, Sir, for my boy's sake. Come, Miss Ellen, it is getting late."

"I came here for another reason which I have not mentioned yet, Philip," said Ellen, in a hesitating manner; "you must not be offended."

"Offended! Is it likely?"

"Will you let me lend you my two thousand pounds,—only lend you for a time, Philip? Don't flush up so! It may help to turn the scale of fortune in your favour, and in your hands retrieve much that was lost this morning."

"Thanks, cousin; but there is only one reply to make—you can guess it?"

"I wish you would consider well before you answer."

"Not for a moment, Ellen. All is uncertain with me in the future, and I will not risk one farthing of your money."

"Come, Miss Barchard," said Mrs. Holts, impatiently.

"You doubled my legacy, Philip, will you let me lend you one half; it is your rightful share?"

"Let me fall alone if I must fall, cousin; I will have no sufferers with me."

Ellen saw that further importunity was unavailing and gave in with a sigh.

"I am ready, Mrs. Holts."

Ellen and Mrs. Holts departed, and left me to my reveries and balance-sheet. Those reveries were disturbed no more until the evening, when there came a note on which the few following lines were hastily traced;—

*"No. 507, Charlotte Street, Blackfriars."*

"MR. FARLEY — Will you come directly — the business is urgent.

"L. HOLTS."

I felt assured some clue to the mystery of the fire had been discovered, and that to-night would place it in my hands, whether to follow it out or let it rest for ever I could not yet determine.

Immediately on receipt of the note I set forth as directed, and reached No. 507, Charlotte Street, Blackfriars Road, at the early hour of nine o'clock. A dirty servant-maid responded to my summons at the door, and at the mention of the name of Holts, grumbled out "third-floor front," and rushed back to the lower regions.

I was half-way up the stairs on my voyage of discovery, when a faint light shone forth from above, and the face of Mrs. Holts peered over the banisters.

"Is that Mr. Farley?"

"Yes—it is I."

"This way, Sir," directed Mrs. Holts, shedding a light upon my path by means of half a rushlight stuck in a chamber-candlestick.

When I was at her side, she pointed to the door before me, and said in a low whisper—

"You must promise me to pardon him—not to think too vilely of him, because his head is weak, and there is not one scrap of firmness in his nature. You *will* pardon him?"

"Did he set the mill on fire?"

"God forbid!"

"Lead the way, then. You need not fear me."

"I have frightened from him all that he knows about the mill. It is, I think, sufficient."

We entered the room, a meanly-furnished room with a small tent-bedstead in one corner of it. Young Holts, haggard and pale, was in the bed, but as I entered he drew the counterpane over his head, and began trembling like a child.

"Your master is here, Edward," said Mrs. Holts.

A muffled voice beneath the sheet murmured some indistinct reply.

"Tell him what you have told me, and be quick about it," she said, sharply.

"I can't," replied the smothered voice.

"Shall I then?"

"Yes, yes—tell him all. Oh! how ill I am—oh! dear."

"Will Mr. Farley please to be seated?"

I took the cane-bottomed chair which she indicated by a nod of her head, and Mrs. Holts drew a second chair to the side of the bed, and placed her bony fingers on a hand, thin and white as a girl's, that stole out to meet her own.

"These are poor apartments for a junior clerk in Mr. Farley's service," said Mrs. Holts, "but he could afford no better, you will learn the reason presently."

"Mother, will you tell him that too?" cried the voice, in a louder tone.

"I will tell him all. It is your penance."

Mr. Holts groaned, and with his disengaged hand drew the counterpane tighter over his face.

"I will be brief as possible, if you will be patient with me, Mr. Farley," began Mrs. Holts, "but it is necessary to speak concerning my boy here, before I mention one word of the fire. Edward Holts, Sir, was born with a weak head, but with a heart in the right place. He has never known decision in his life, a child has always led him. Of so weak a character by nature, he became naturally every man's dupe—more particularly the dupe of one wicked and designing man, his father."

"His father," I repeated.

"His father, and my husband—the man Vauclose, Grainger, or by whatever name he has been known to you, the villain!"



She stamped her foot upon the floor.

"His day must have an end ; better now, for all our sakes, than at some future day."

"Vauclose, your husband !" I said, not yet recovered from my amazement ; "that man, of all others !"

"Four and twenty years ago, I, Mrs. Barchard's second cousin, married that man of all others for love—and he, a schemer and adventurer, married me for a small fortune I inherited. Mr. Farley, you may imagine there was no happiness to follow such a match."

Remembering my own too well I could truly answer, "I can imagine it."

"But you cannot imagine the life I led when I was in his power. A life of which its parallel is found day after day on the records of police courts ; a life not singular in itself, but one that the rich and educated only know by hearsay—the life of brutes. Taunts, studied cruelties, blows, and those not unfrequent, soon woke me from my vision, told me that my husband had loved my money, not my ugly face, beat out of me my spirit, crushed my nerves, destroyed my health, and made me what I am. When this boy was four years old, my husband had become so wholly bad, so reckless, that he forged his master's name to a cheque for fifty pounds, passed it at the bank and fled. Those masters were Messrs. Crawley and Hodkins—they were Mr. Barchard's masters also at that time. Years after he ventured back to his old haunts, found me and my boy out, took from me all the earnings of seven or eight years—I had opened in his absence a little haberdasher's shop—fled away once more. Thus, coming and going, and always full of evil, he made my life a terror. When his purse was full—for he earned money as an actor, as a conjuror at times—I saw nothing of him, but in his poverty he tracked me like a bloodhound, and drained my substance from me."

"I should have mentioned his name to Messrs. Crawley and Hodkins."

"He was still my husband, and I could not turn against him. But you have come to listen to another story—not to mine."

She pressed the thin hand that lay in hers and continued—

"When my boy grew up, he obtained through the influence of Mr. Barchard a situation in Mr. Crawley's mill—that was the safest place for him, I thought, more out of his father's way. That father did not find him out until the mill had be-

come Mr. Barchard's property ; then the sorrows of my boy commenced. Holts robbed him of his salary by holding over him my name, threatening to follow me and claim me, unless the son helped to support him in his idleness and evil ways, until——"

"Oh ! mother."

"Hush ! we have been living with a mask on all our lives —let us lower it for this once, and have confidence in Mr. Farley."

"I will not abuse it," I said.

"Until—in a weak moment, when the devil tempted him, my son abstracted a small sum from that petty cash, over which he had control. He replaced that sum with his next week's salary, but one crime follows another, and next week saw a second deed—a third committed. Thus he went downhill, struggling all the way, pilfering for his father's sake, pilfering that his mother might be spared from taunt, and oath, and blow, until the day of Mr. Barchard's death. Then I found out his crime, and cursed him in my anger."

The figure in the bed shrank with the recollection.

"This boy had been my only hope to cling to, and I had lived to find that faith uprooted, and see him following in his father's steps. But it was too hard to part with him—he had not sinned for himself, and a mother's love could not throw him off. At last he promised me, by word and oath, to sin no more, let sorrow come what might, and he made restitution to Miss Barchard by paying her weekly one-half of his salary whilst in your employ,—I took the money to her, every Sunday, despite her reluctance to accept it. With confidence in my son restored, my mind grew less a torture to myself ; his change of place, and my change of residence, baffled my husband for a time, but he tracked Edward out at last, on that very day you met them together in the mill-yard. He found his son, however, strong enough to resist his temptations ; no power of his could make him sin *at that time*. Then commenced a studied persecution of my boy—and of myself when he discovered me—and so time went on till yesterday."

"Ah ! yesterday," moaned Holts.

"Father and son met in the streets—the father prayed for money. Edward resisted ; weak as he was, he resisted for a time. The father played the actor and feigned the penitent, spoke of his debts, his helpless state, cried, swore, and raved in the streets,

declared that he should be carried away to prison for debt in the morning, unless ten pounds were raised for him. You, Sir, can guess the end of this pitiable story of human weakness—the son paid the ten pounds from the insurance money, intending to make the sum good in the morning, intending to confess all to his mother and trust to her to raise the amount required.”

Holts dragged the sheet from his face and struggled to a sitting posture.

“Yes, I was fool enough, mad enough, wretch enough, to risk the insurance and steal your money, Sir! Mad enough too to tell him that it *was* insurance money, and that it was the last day—the last day!”

“Was he alone?”

“There was some one with him when I met him first—I did not see his face—I did not look at him attentively. He waited at the corner of the street until the interview was over.”

“Your father did not set fire to the mill.”

“The man is wholly bad, you do not know him,” cried Mrs. Holts.

“He must be found.”

“It is justice,” said Mrs. Holts, gloomily; “I have had a struggle, but I have conquered my own weakness. It is your duty, Sir, and ours.”

“Some proofs may be discovered of the crime, and he may lead the way to them.”

Mrs. Holts drew a small bag from her pocket, rose from her chair, and thrust the bag in my hands, saying:—

“There is the ten pounds, Sir.”

“But——”

“Not a word, Sir, if you please,” said she, sternly; “it is a debt — no matter how it impoverishes me — I will not hear a word.”

I rose, and crossed to the bedside.

“Holts,” said I, “I have promised to forgive you. It was weak, criminal and foolish, to give away my money; but the evil it has caused may teach a lesson, and make a better man of you. I forgive you.”

“Bless you! you are very kind to say so.”

I was leaving the room, when Mrs. Holts said—

“You will follow the clue placed in your hands, Mr. Farley?”

“Yes.”

“It is your duty to follow it—it was ours to disclose it. We

have fulfilled ours with pain and shame, may yours be a lighter task, Sir."

"I fear not."

"We dare not ask you to spare him from the law's punishment, Sir. It is best, perhaps, that this man should receive the heaviest penalty justice can inflict upon him for his crime, but we, his wife and son, know not what is best."

"Who knows what is best for him in this troubled life, would be wiser than his neighbours," I thought, as I went down the dark stairs, and left the miserable pair to their bitter meditations.



## CHAPTER VI.

### MY REVENGE.

IF I had had the will to put an end to further inquiry the power was taken out of my hands, and the stern Law considering my injury its own, set its servants quietly to work. Law gazed upon the blackened ruins of my mill, and shook its head distrustfully when men, learned in the history of fires, gave their report and spoke of their suspicions. Law set its great machinery in motion, and the velvet-footed spies stole out one by one from their retreats, and spread themselves in all directions.

Early the next morning the spies were on the scent, late the next night a fox was hunted down. The news came instantly to me, and Ike Boxham was the messenger introduced into my lonely sitting-room at eleven o'clock at night.

Ike, cap in hand, entered the room in extraordinary fashion, walking sideways towards me on the heavy iron clamps of his boots. Ike's broad face was expressive of intense satisfaction as he advanced.

"What, Ike, at this time of night! Take a chair."

Ike sat down on the extreme edge of a chair, and put his cap on his knees after the fashion of many years ago, when he had paid a warning visit to Harp Street, Bethnal Green.

"We've got him, Sir," said Ike, with an expressive chuckle.

"Got whom?" exclaimed I, somewhat startled;

"The chap who fired the mill, Sir. Oh, my eye, ain't he frightened, I can tell you!"

"Secured him," I said, "are you certain of the man?"

"I'm certain it's the man who dodged about the premises that night; he does not deny it, he's so precious frightened!"

"A tall man, marked with small-pox, Ike?"

"Awfully marked, Sir. I knowed him on the instant. I've been on the watch along with the police, Sir, ever since you saw me last. I caught, him, Sir. I was the werry fust to lay a hand on him, and—wasn't he frightened!"

The fright of the gentleman alluded to appeared to give inexpressible delight to Mr. Boxham, to judge by the fat chuckle which followed each allusion to the circumstance.

"I suppose I am required at the police-station, Ike?"

"Why, yes, Sir; they would like to know if as how you have any knowledge of the party who is so werry frightened—they are anxious on that pint, Sir. Me and the policeman started off at once, and the policeman is coming up the road directly. I was obliged to run on ahead and get the start; I wasn't going to let him tell all!"

"We will start at once, Ike," said I jumping up; "there may be a mistake."

"Oh! yes, lots of a mistake," said Ike, ironically, as we closed the street-door behind us, and met the police officer, whose temper had been soured by Boxham's rude behaviour, coming up the steps. We did not reach the station-house till half-past eleven o'clock, and then several minutes passed before the prisoner was brought to me. One glance sufficed to assure me that the gentleman arrested on suspicion of setting fire to my mill was the identical Mr. Holts, better known to myself and my readers by the name of Grainger or Vauclose.

Ike Boxham was right; Mr. Holts was suffering from considerable alarm, and as he advanced, shaking in every limb, and with his hands beseechingly clasped together, no truer picture of an abject coward could have been placed before me. Such a man forgetting, in his trouble, all that was manlike, I could readily imagine had been the brutal husband and unnatural father Mrs. Holts had lately described.

"Oh! Mr. Farley, you know me, Sir," he began, in a whining tone; "you knew me years ago for a respectable man, a friend of your friends, weak-headed, but a good fellow enough, wasn't I? How many times have we supped to

gether and sworn friendship over our wine—and you do not credit for a moment the base suspicions brought against my honour, do you now? Dear Mr. Farley, I am a poor man, but I have always been an honest one—upon my soul I have!”

“Spare me your protestations,” said I, coldly; “they do not interest me in your favour.”

“Oh! for the Lord’s sake, don’t say that you are prejudiced against me too, Mr. Farley,” he cried, bursting into tears.

“Can you account for your appearance in Thames Street a few hours before the fire broke out?”

“I was not there, upon my——”

“Why you told us you were, you liar!” bawled the indignant Boxham. Holts gave a startled glance in the direction of the giant Ike, took in the police officer at the door, turned to me again.

“Ah! so I was, but my sorrows have affected my recollection—oh! what shall I do, what shall I do? I was there,” whimpered he, “I wanted to see a friend of mine who holds a place in your employ.”

“Your son?”

Mr. Holts jumped with surprise, but there was ready tact in his reply.

“My son, as you say, Sir; surely it was natural enough for a father to desire to see his son and bless him. My dear son who——”

“Your pardon, Mr. Holts,” said I, interrupting him; “but spare me an exhibition of your histrionic talent—I have come on a painful errand, and would not needlessly prolong my stay here. My carman tells me that you were watching *after* your son had left the premises—account for that, Sir.”

“I was not—it was—may I die if I did not go away before then. I can prove it—I can prove it.”

“So much the better for you, Mr. Holts.” I turned to the officer at the door. “I know this man, and unfortunately know nothing to his advantage—I suppose that is sufficient for the present?”

“Quite, Sir.”

“Mr. Farley, I hope that you will say nothing to prejudice the law against me,” screamed the coward; “it will be very hard to rake up all the follies of the past, over which I have mourned for many, many years; it may transport me for life, Sir; for mercy’s sake have some consideration!”

"I must add, that if this man be the incendiary, he had no malice to satisfy, and I believe no object to gain."

"There, there," cried Holts, "it's plain enough. Why should I be the wretch to set the mill on fire and have no reason, no excuse! Mr. Farley, you will speak up for me before a judge and jury, won't you?"

"Mr. Holts," said I, sternly, "you can throw some light upon the mystery; it is in your power to point out the prime mover of that plot which has succeeded but too well. You knew the mill was uninsured that night, Sir. Take my word for it, that you will find it best to tell the whole truth, for mayhap in your anxiety to screen the guilty one, you may suffer the punishment for his crime—and the law's punishment for arson is no light one."

Mr. Holts wrung his hands.

"Hanging!" said the officer; "and so the sooner you make a virtue of necessity the better. We were quick enough to put our hands upon you, and we shall soon save you the trouble of confession by discovering the truth ourselves."

"Oh! dear, oh! dear, what shall I do?"

"We've got a very strong idea now. Do you know what T stands for?"

"Oh!"

"Come now, have you anything to say?"

"It does go better for you, I know," said Holts, beginning to whimper again; "and I am innocent enough—why should I suffer for the guilty? I'll tell all, I'll tell all," cried he; "I was the tool for him whose tool I have been for many years—he did it with his own hand—Tregancy did it—bring me a Bible, I will swear it."

"Where does he live?" I asked, eagerly.

"I don't know—I haven't known for months," cried he. "Mind, if he's already caught, I've turned Queen's evidence."

"This man is ready to confess everything; is some one in authority here prepared to listen to him?"

"Certainly, there is, Sir," answered the officer.

"Then, having no right to interfere at present, I leave him in your hands—I shall know all at the examination; I am late—you must excuse me—I have business to complete to-night."

Uttering one rapid excuse after another, I backed out of the room, and left Mr. Holts to make his statement.

Ike Boxham followed me into the street.

"Good-night, Boxham," said I, abruptly checking the com-

mentement of an oration ; "I am pressed for time. Good-night."

Five minutes afterwards I was in a cab hastening in the direction of the hotel wherein John Tregancy had resided at the time of our last meeting. It was the only address with which I was acquainted, and I feared that it was a vain hope to dream of meeting him. Yet he must be seen and spoken with ; there was my revenge to come, and I would not leave a stone unturned to find him.

The West-end hotel was closed when the cab stopped before the door, but there were lights in many windows of the house, and, doubtless, there was a night porter to be found in the vast establishment.

"Wait," said I to the cabman.

"All right, yer honour."

A loud summons at the door, instantly responded to by a sleepy-looking individual in black.

"Is Mr. Tregancy still residing here ?"

"Mr. who ?"

"Tregancy."

"Don't recollect the name. I'll ask."

The yawning individual shuffled out of sight, leaving me to wait his return in the dimly-lighted hall. He was as long returning as if he had been to make inquiry of every living creature on the premises. Presently, however, he came shuffling back again, yawning worse than ever.

"Mr. Tre—yah !—rancid left three months ago."

"If you could favour me with his address——"

"Don't know it."

"Will you be good enough to ask ? His trunks were probably directed to another hotel in the vicinity, and the address may still be on the books."

"The butler's fast asleep and won't answer nothing more," said the man, irritated by my persistency.

"Wake the butler, then—my business is important."

I slipped a half-crown into the man's hand, and with the ruling passion strong in stupor, the ready fingers closed upon the gift.

"I'll go and ask again, Sir," said the man, more wide awake by several degrees ; "I'll tell him it's a matter of life and death, Sir."

"It is," I answered.

The man went away with alacrity, leaving me to admire a



specimen of ornamental text-hand, framed and glazed and secured against the wall, which informed me that "The servants of that establishment were not allowed to receive gratuities." The porter must have adopted urgent measures, and startled the butler out of his equanimity as well as his sleep, for that important personage, half dressed and rather nervous, made his appearance in the hall.

"I beg pardon, Sir—bless my soul, life and death, Sir, you say, Sir. Very sorry, Sir, to have kept you waiting, Sir. Detective, I presume, Sir?"

"Can you oblige me with Mr. Tregancy's address?"

"Fortunately we can, Sir. Mr. Tregancy left his address behind, Sir, in order that his letters might be forwarded. The address is in the book on the—I'll get it directly, Sir."

Butler dashed at the door of a small room on my left and disappeared. Porter having fulfilled his mission and been paid for it, sank into an easy chair underneath the gas lamp, and fell asleep with an angelic smile upon his countenance.

Reappearance of butler with a slip of paper in his hand.

"Ink not quite dry yet, Sir—here's address, Sir—Gray's Inn Road, Sir."

"Thank you."

"Hope it is nothing very serious, Sir. Mr. Tregancy was nice gentleman enough, Sir. Paid for everything, Sir, at once—and—ahem!—did not forget the servants, Sir."

The butler of that vast establishment who, I have no doubt, had some snug hundreds in the savings bank or three per cents., and perhaps indulged in Elysian dreams of a public house with cook in St. Giles', was not too proud, despite the text-hand warning on the wall, to accept my second half-crown, which melted gracefully in his palm.

In the cab again, and rattling to No. —, Gray's Inn Road. Before the house, a large, gloomy building, dark, weather-beaten and neglected, standing at the corner of a dark and more neglected street. Looking at it, it seemed to me a type of John Tregancy's life and sinking fortunes.

Three times a forcible appeal to the listening sense of the sleepers within, before I heard feet echoing in the passage.

"Who's there?" demanded a woman's voice through the key-hole.

"Does Mr. Tregancy live here?"

"No; he's left."

"I want his address—if you can give me that informa-

tion you will oblige me—it is most important that I should know it.”

“I’ll ask the missus.”

The girl left the key-hole and the sound of slippered feet ascending stairs succeeded. A long silence, my back against the door, the cabman nodding on his box, the cab-horse fast asleep and snoring.

To my impatient mind it appeared full half an hour before the girl’s feet were heard descending the stairs and advancing towards the door again.

“Missus says she doesn’t know exactly.”

Baffled in my pursuit, I still hesitated to resign it—to let the link in the chain be wholly lost.

“Not exactly !” I repeated.

“He asked what sort of place York Road was, and the names of some of the streets in York Road, a day or two before he left ; that’s all missus knows, Sir.”

“York Road, Lambeth ?”

“Yes, Sir.”

I turned away and walked towards my cab.

“Where to, Sir ?” asked the cabman, waking up.

“Hammersmith.”

A moment afterwards, I pulled the check-string and cried out—

“To York Road, Lambeth, and drive your hardest.”

There did not seem the shadow of a chance that I should find him ; having no address to guide me, not being sure that he had even crossed the Thames, I still could not give up the search. Feverish and excited, I must keep on the chase, however hopeless the pursuit. *He* had made inquiry concerning York Road, Lambeth—it might possibly be his place of abode—I would proceed thither at least—those who were already following in my track would follow on as small a hope, and I *must* be there before them !

Back again, down Gray’s Inn Road and Chancery Lane, through Temple Bar, along the Strand and across Waterloo Bridge to York Road, Lambeth.

“I peered from the cab-windows at every house in the road, with what intention I hardly knew myself ; certainly, with little hope of discovering John Tregancy. York Road was deserted ; from its beginning in Waterloo Road, to its end in Westminster Bridge Road, there was not a solitary human being to enliven the dreary prospect. I gazed at the few

lights in the up-stair windows of the houses on either side, and once as the figure of a man passed behind a blind, I cried out "Stop!" But the folly of the proceeding shamed me into saying "Drive on again," and the cabman, cursing softly to himself, complied with the request.

At Westminster Bridge Road, the cabman called "Which way, Sir?"

I hesitated.

"Back once more," said I, at last; "and over Waterloo Bridge."

The cab turned and we retraced our course. In the few moments that had intervened, signs of life had started as if by magic in the street; there was a policeman muffled in his rough great-coat standing beside a lamp-post, a man in workman's clothes with a basket at his back tramping to an early job, and a cab standing at the door of a house, in one of those narrow, dirty streets which lead to Belvidere Road.

When my cab brought me to Waterloo Road again, I thought of the other cab I had seen standing at the door of a house in the by-street. What did it want there at that hour of the morning?—had it just brought home a late fare?—was it waiting to take away some one?—to take away whom?

"Back again," I cried.

"Again?" said the man, surlily.

"Yes, half-way—to the corner of the street in which that cab was standing."

At the corner of the street the cabman stopped once more, and I instantly leaped out.

"Wait here," cried I.

After a moment's reflection, I walked slowly down the street. The owner of the strange cab was standing in the doorway, smoking a short pipe—the door was open.

"Are you engaged?"

"Yes, Sir."

A shilling slipped into his hand elicited a ready reply to my next question.

"Your fare is a gentleman?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Going to the railway, I suppose?"

"Yes, Sir," for the third time.

"Have you seen him?"

"What's the row—is anything up?" inquired the cabman.

"Have you seen him?" I repeated.

"Yes; I have just brought him from the West-end."

"What kind of man is he—tall?"

"Yes, and dark—not unlike a blessed nigger, I may say—what's he done, mate?"

"Nothing."

I had found him by the strangest chance—I had not tracked him all that night in vain—it was destined that he and I should meet! The tread of feet softly descending the stairs, aroused me to the task before me, and after a moment's pause, I advanced at a quick step down the narrow passage. Some one turned the angle of the staircase—Tregancy! He started, stopped as I steadily advanced, hesitated, then turning back, walked slowly up the stairs again. He went into the front room on the first floor, and I followed him. When I entered he was standing in the centre of the room, with his hand resting heavily upon the table. An old-fashioned gas-chandelier, the lights turned nearly out, hung from the ceiling.

"John Tregancy, you did not expect to see me here to-night," said I, closing the room door.

"No," he answered, with his glittering eyes fixed on me.

"You have had your revenge—I have come for mine."

"Indeed."

"I have come to relieve Mr. Tregancy's mind, too; he may have some doubts as to the complete ruin he has effected—let him dispel them on the instant."

Tregancy began gently drumming his long fingers on the table.

"Let me add, that the man Holts, or Vauclose, is arrested, has confessed, and that the officers of justice are on Mr. Tregancy's track."

Tregancy continued beating on the table with his fingers. His eyes had not once dropped beneath my glance—he stood there braving every look—a tiger brought to bay.

"Not one word in denial of your guilt?"

"Have you come to hear me lie?" he asked in a low suppressed tone.

"Not one word in defence, Tregancy?"

"I shall not defend myself to Philip Farley," he answered, scornfully; "or utter words that would be brought against me in a court of justice, by the hirelings who wait your signal to

arrest me. When I am cooler and have more command over myself, I will answer such as you ! ”

“ Neither denial nor defence,” said I, unmoved by the withering hate which spoke in his last words ; “ well, then, Tregancy, I will wait for one word of regret.”

“ God will strike me dead before I utter it ! ”

“ Not regret for my misfortunes, I am not asking that, but for your crime, man ? ”

Again no answer. No sound but the quick breathing of us both, and the sharp, irritating tattoo on the table against which Tregancy stood.

“ Was there no thought of your sister when your wilful hand set fire to my warehouses—no thought that her hopes might perish in the flames as well as mine ? ”

“ I thought of nothing.”

“ Think, now, Sir, that your revenge has been taken, and all that your black heart exulted in has been accomplished, and now hear the result. You have made me a better man, less worldly and less selfish, with energy to begin again, and with hope to become hereafter rich again ; resigned to my loss, and resolving from this night to think no more of it ; looking forward to happiness with wife and child in my new home, and leaving my future in God’s hands.”

Tregancy writhed as if with pain. My calmness, my earnestness assured him that I was not feigning fortitude, and that his triumph was after all a poor one.

“ That happiness will be enhanced,” he replied, “ by knowing you have swept me from your path. Revenge sweetens life, you will discover, Farley.”

“ Has your revenge made life so sweet, then ? ”

“ I am contented with my work, for Mr. Farley is a beggar ! Now whistle in your dogs of law, and set them at my throat.”

“ I have come alone.”

“ Ha ! ”

His hand clutched the table till it groaned again, and he twice muttered “ alone,” as though my words were undeserving of belief.

“ Yes, I have come alone for my revenge, Tregancy.” I opened the room door and threw it back. “ My revenge is to warn you—to bid you fly whilst there is time left you to escape ; to tell you that another hour will be too late, and it is written in the books of law that he who commits arson shall suffer death ! ”

"This—this—from you !"

"You cannot understand it, Tregancy ; you never will, perhaps," said I ; "enough that it is my revenge."

"What if I balk you in it," he hissed, "by surrendering myself to justice, and avowing all ?"

"You will not do that."

"I have nothing to live for ; poor devils who have known better days," with a short, scornful laugh, "are so much better out of the world !"

"Tregancy might face death, but his strong passions, his restless spirit, could not brook a life-long punishment in a convict settlement."

"Right," said he, huskily, "right."

"Let me then advise Tregancy to lose no time. I part with him for ever. I trust his life may yet witness his repentance for the wrong done to his sister's husband."

He made one movement to depart, then stopped again and looked at me strangely. There was a struggle within him. I could detect it in every movement, in every emotion that played across his face. He came at last towards me.

"Farley," said he, in a deep voice, "I am going, is there anything more to say ?"

"No."

"Going away for ever, to disappear in the dark night, and leave behind only a bitter memory—you have no more to say ?"

"I could say more, Tregancy, but every minute is very precious to you."

"Say on, I care not."

"You go to a foreign land ?"

"Yes."

"In that land, under a new name, try to begin a new life."

"No," he replied ; "evil is at my heart, and flows in every vein of my body. I am full of hatred, malice, and uncharitableness. I am lost—lost !"

"No one is wholly lost, Tregancy"

"'Tis false—I am !" he cried ; "lost to all sense of honour, justice, mercy ! Farley, do you know that you have shamed me, man," he almost shrieked, "made me a curse to myself for ever and ever, on earth and in hell !"

"Forbear—forbear !"

"I will say one thing before I go, man—I did the deed alone. I learned that your insurance had expired from Vauclose, and I,

full of hate and madness, set fire to the mill. I did the deed alone, I say—and now, let me go ! ”

“ Tregancy, say you regret it, before we part for ever.”

He ran to me, caught me by both hands, and griped them hard.

“ I never thought to hold these hands in mine again—to feel for you once more as I did in the far-off time at school. If I stayed here all my old hate would come stealing to my heart once more, and I should loathe you for robbing me of Rhoda’s fortune—robbing me of Ellen ! ”

“ Not of Ellen, Tregancy.”

“ No matter—not another word ! ” cried he. “ I am going away, never to be seen or talked of more. From this moment I am dead to you, to my sister, to her boy. I vanish into darkness. I bid you good-bye, Farley, in this world,” he wrung my hands, and let them drop, “ and,” with an awful smile, “ now, good-bye in the next ! ”

So John Tregancy and Philip Farley parted, never on earth to meet again !

Year followed year, time lined my face and streaked my hair with grey, held out the prizes of life, and turned up many blanks, gave comfort here, and taught me resignation there, proved to me how every day and hour has its changes, and how strangely those changes come to pass—but in night or morning, joy or tribulation, John Tregancy and I never met again.



## CHAPTER VII.

### GIVING WAY.

I LOST no time in returning to business, in plunging to the innermost depths of trade, and seeking oblivion in facts and figures from all that was past cure. To waste moments in idle regrets was not worthy of a school-girl, how much less of a man who prided himself on self-possession. I became Mr. Crawley’s agent and collector, and in time, after a lingering illness caused by his rashness on the night of the fire, Charley Esden enlisted under the same flag. Charley and I brought a large connection with us, and it paid Mr. Crawley to engage us both, nevertheless, Mr. Crawley was a good master

despite the sharp eye he kept on his own interests ; he was a man of the world, but there was a heart in his bosom though he was fond of fifty per cent. for his money.

So the old days came back again ; Frank, Charley, and I were at work in the same mill wherein we had worked side by side in Uncle Barchard's time, and though each of us had grown graver and sadder, and each had a great loss to dwell on, yet few brothers held so fast by one another, or sympathised with one another so deeply as the brothers Esden and I. With my change of fortune fell the Esden pride and reserve, and we were good friends together from that time forth.

The business of Mr. Crawley was naturally not my especial study ; there were debts to pay off, bills to meet, builders to contract with, lawyers to consult ; the business I had abandoned jostled with that I had taken up, and the weight on my mind was very heavy. Still I bore up well—I never despaired—I waged war with my pen against the hurricane of accounts that poured in from every side, scheming and arguing, striving and studying, fighting my way inch by inch up that difficult hill at the bottom of which lie so many unfortunates.

I had exchanged my grand residence for a small cottage half a mile nearer London on the Hammersmith Road, and reduced my household staff to a nursery-maid and a servant of all work. Rhoda was still in ignorance of the change ; she was getting well in health and strong in mind, and I would not crush her with my unfortunate home-news. The thought of how deeply I should be in Mr. Creency's debt for the expenses of my wife's long tour, troubled me at times, too, but that would be worked off with the rest—a little more exertion, a little longer night-work by way of overtime, and then some fine day in the future the clouds would drift away for ever. One thing I dreaded, the return of Rhoda to the small eight-roomed house I was occupying, with its narrow slip of garden at the front and back—the No. 42 of Buckingham Terrace ! Rhoda's mind was not a strong one, had never been tested by real misfortune and loss, how would she bear up in the hour of her trial ? There was another thought, too, which would stop me in the midst of my calculations, and take me away from quarters of wheat and hundreds of 'Whites,' and 'No. 2's'—the thought lest Rhoda's intention was to be eternally separated from me and



my child, lest she feared her old weakness would betray her into her old follies, if we sat down side by side again, and called each other man and wife. There was to be no home for me, if that thought was a true one—not till my boy grew up, perhaps—my dear, big boy, whose love for me was very great, and made my heart leap—not till he fell in love and married, when I might find a place in *his* home and be a happy grandfather!

Yes, the mother of my boy hung aloof from me. Her life was apart from mine, although my heart yearned for her. I longed to make atonement for the cruel past by a new life at her feet, but Fate stood between us both, and with its hand of mail thrust us asunder!

Four months after the fire, when the mill was rising from its ashes, when by dint of untiring energy the tangled threads of my ruined plans were unravelled and set straight again, when I had given satisfaction to Mr. Crawley as his agent, when there was sunshine on Mark Lane, and master millers were in a flourishing condition, when Mr. Holts had been acquitted of the crime of setting fire to my mills, and there was a large reward for John Tregancy's apprehension, when the summer was coming and the spring was old, my strength gave way, and I succumbed at last.

The tension of every nerve had been sustained too long, and the chords relaxed suddenly and laid me prostrate. It was the first illness which I remembered, and that made it more intolerable; I had never been accustomed to lie on my back and take sixth parts of very nasty compounds every four hours, to be harassed with pills at night and draughts in the morning. It was hard to know that I grew no better, that at times I was scarcely conscious of what was passing in my chamber; hard to feel I was lying there, as Scott hath it, "like a bedridden monk," and the busy world in which I had always strived was working on outside; hard to learn my affairs were made straight and needed only overlooking, and yet to know I was too weak to hold a pen and write, write, for very life; hard to be certain that all things calculated to promote my interest were at a standstill, and I was adding to my expenses every day. Friends came to see me in my sick chamber and exerted themselves to console me; friends took my work on their hands, and laboured for my cause; Charley and Frank—true friends and true brothers—did their best with my books and papers, and would

have it that no exertions of their own gave them a moment's trouble. Ellen came once a day to pacify my fretfulness, to assure me that I should soon be well again if I ceased to excite myself about my business ; Mrs. Holts came, even young Holts favoured me, and Ike Boxham called regularly every morning to know "how 'master' was," although it was five miles out of his way, and there was an extraordinary run of rainy weather at the time. Charley Esden and Ellen Barchard met frequently in my room, and got on very well together ; Charley had a great deal to say to Ellen about me, and was very silent and thoughtful after she had gone home with Mrs. Holts. Ellen had more opportunities of witnessing the noble nature of my friend, of seeing how strenuously he worked for me night after night, and never thought of the fagging day he had had in Mr. Crawley's service, maintaining that "he was not tired," and "let him be," and spelling at my books so long that I had to feign an ill temper to induce him to relinquish them. Charley was a handsome young man, a clever and a thoughtful one, and hard must be the heart of a disengaged young lady who can see such a man very often—know that he loves her and has loved her all his life—and yet be cruel. I fancied I could detect a softening in Ellen, just the faintest change in the world, signs of a blush and tremor occasionally ; fancied too, that some day Charley Esden would ask a question of her for the second time, and not be disappointed in his answer. I had plenty of time to think of these things—there was no action for me—I had fallen like my mill and my fortune, and was daily fretting at that want of strength which kept me from my rightful share of work.

"Oh ! for my wife to watch beside my pillow and soothe me with her loving words—my wife for ever parted from me !"

I was not strong enough to leave my room and walk about the house till the middle of the summer, and then I was still too weak to think of business. After a while I could venture into the streets on sunshiny afternoons, but I walked after the fashion of an old man of eighty, and found a stick to rest upon at times a necessity not to be despised.

After a few days' fencing with my doctor, I yielded reluctantly, almost savagely, to his solicitations, and started to the Isle of Wight in search of health and strength. I could not go alone, I took my boy and his nurse with me, and settled down in a cottage near the quiet village of Freshwater. There

was no society in which I could mix—I did not seek any—and I was better by myself.

My lonely walks on the breezy downs brought back part of my old vigour, and I had come for strength, not happiness. Sometimes on the rough shingle in the bay I sat with my little boy, and looking out at sea, wondered when Rhoda would cross to her home, and my boy, more forgetful than his father, played beside me. A few stragglers from the world of fashion glanced at me from the lonely hotel windows, now and then; the coast-guards gave me good-day on their beat, and the boatmen, when I met them, touched their hats, but Freshwater was always quiet, and my sensitive mind was not troubled by any intrusion on its thoughts, whilst I gathered strength in England's garden isle.

One day I had wandered inland amongst the fields and hedgerows, thinking at every step of home, and business, and Rhoda. The reader is probably aware that Freshwater a few years since was broken into fragments, and that a house dotting here and there the wild green landscape helped to form the village; there was a cottage to the left, another to the right, a post office a mile and a half from the hotel near the bay, and a shop—perhaps two—bordering a melancholy country road.

At the corner of a green lane I came upon a cottage, the front-room of which served as an apology for a shop—a baker's shop, stocked with a few home-baked half-quarters that were getting hard in the sun, and seemed arranged in a dismal row to catch the eyes of the crows in the opposite field. A ticket at the back of the shop caught my eye, and reminded me of a lost acquaintance, an old ticket that had seen service in a more stirring part of the world's surface, a "Down again" ticket, with "Best Bread 7½," in blue Roman capitals beneath.

I leaned over the garden palings, and gazed in at the window, till a figure from within, attracted by my interest in the establishment, came to the window and looked out. Mr. Tackeridge and I stared each other in the face!

Mr. Tackeridge would have retreated but I gave a nod of recognition.

"Good Lord! is that you, Sir?" he exclaimed, flinging up the window; "Mr. Farley, Sir, is it possible that I see you here?"

"Or that I see you here, Mr. Tackeridge?"

"Won't you come in?" he inquired in feeble tones.

"Thank you," I replied; "I fear that I have overtaxed my

strength a little, and will, with your kind permission, Mr. Tackeridge, intrude upon your hospitality."

Mr. Tackeridge, disappointed with my readiness to accept his invitation, drew his head into his shop, closed the window and opened the street door. I advanced along the garden path and shook hands with Mr. Tackeridge.

"Glad to see you looking so well, Mr. Tackeridge."

"Sorry to see you looking so ill, Mr. Farley," said he in reply; "come in, Sir; how you've altered! mind the scraper—Mrs. Tackeridge!" he bawled.

"Well?" very sharply from up stairs.

"Here's a friend come to see us, Mrs. T."

"What?"

"A friend—Mr. Farley."

I heard Mrs. Tackeridge lump herself down in a chair with a weight that nearly shook the ceiling on our heads.

"She'll come presently," said Mr. T., leading the way into a small back parlour, scantily furnished; "take a seat. Well," with a heavy sigh, "this is a precious change, eh? Lost all my money and shops, lost all my spirits; done for, Sir, beautifully!"

"You took the world by surprise, Sir."

"Daresay I did; I never could see the good of making a fuss about losses till there was occasion for it. I hope you will not drop a word in town concerning where I am, Sir, for I *may* find it inconvenient."

"You may rely upon my discretion, Mr. Tackeridge."

"I paid some of my creditors—all those I could pay. I gave them nearly three-farthings in the pound, and then I came down here. What a hole this is!"

"A very pretty place, I think."

"A pretty place for business," said Mr. Tackeridge, with an emphatic grunt; "three sacks a week, and two of them trust. Six customers a day over the counter, and four of them want halfpenny biscuits. There's only Mr. Tennyson makes anything in this part of the Wight, he's a poetry maker and has got no opposition in the neighbourhood. As for me, there is a fellow from somewhere or other comes round with a cart and supplies all the best families—I hope his cart will turn over one day and break his neck—I hate opposition!"

"You should undersell him, Tackeridge."

"If I were to put a clean bill in the window, or stick it on that haystack over the way, and write 'Down Again, Best

Bread to be given away,' I should have my six customers daily, just the same—not a creature more. Oh!" with a groan, "it's wretched and awful work—I wish Mrs. Tackeridge and I were comfortably buried."

"You have not mentioned Miss Annie's name—I trust that she is well?"

"Quite well—she's not here, you know."

"Indeed!"

"She's a governess in a family at Southampton. She's—here's Mrs. T., she can tell you all about it."

Mr. Tackeridge leaned his head against the mantelpiece as if it ached, and with his eyes half shut, and presenting the very picture of the sluggard who was woke up too soon, and required slumber again, languidly surveyed me. With all the energy crushed out of him, sunk as deep in difficulties as he had sunk hundreds in his day, I could but pity him in his low estate.

Mrs. Tackeridge, not quite so stout as formerly, with not quite so broad or smooth a face, came into the back parlour to shake hands with me.

After the ceremony of greeting had been performed, Mrs. Tackeridge burst into tears, dropped into a chair and began to moan.

"You see what we have come to, Sir, in our old age—you see what *he* with his speculations, shops, and 'Down Against' has done for me and my child—I was the daughter of a respectable master butcher, when he married me!"

Mrs. Tackeridge had forgotten that last fact when she lived at Wheatsheaf Villa.

"And this lonely, miserable, melancholy place is our home—our wretched home. And even here a writ may come and take off Tackeridge."

"Let it come," said Mr. Tackeridge, in a reckless manner.

"I'm sure I could do without you," retorted Mrs. Tackeridge; "there would be one mouth less to feed."

"And the business would not trouble you much, my dear; you'd find it a nice and easy one to manage."

Mr. and Mrs. Tackeridge were too worldly, too selfish to have learned any lesson from adversity—it had soured their tempers, and made them discontented; but they were neither humbled nor resigned.

"Time has changed my future for the worse, too," I remarked; "you left me a rich man, you see a very poor one."

"You don't really mean that," cried Mr. Tackeridge, smiling and cheering up amazingly: "ruined, eh?—lost all your money! I'm very sorry—ha! ha! ha!—poor as we are, perhaps—hiding out of the way too—ho, ho!"

"No, I am here for my health's sake."

"I see," with one of his knowing winks.

"Fortunately, I shall be soon able to pay off every farthing of my debts."

"Ah! unfortunately I shall not."

I changed the conversation, by making inquiry concerning Annie. The mother peeped out here, and Mrs. Tackeridge softened.

"My poor dear girl has turned her education to a little account, and she is a governess in a gentleman's family. A governess, Mr. Farley!" she cried; "and I thought that she would be a lady once, my dear, handsome girl, as she was!"

"As she was."

"They are killing her by inches, with their slavery—she has grown so pale and thin."

"A governess in Southampton—I shall pass through Southampton on my return—will you give me her address?"

Mrs. Tackeridge, unconscious of my motive, gave it me forthwith.

"We tried to keep together all three of us, but our means made that impossible," she said, "and yet we were once so well off—so very well off—mixed in such good society!—how's Mr. Esden?"

"Very well, I thank you."

"And—ahem—his sons, Charles and—Frank?"

"Both well, I thank you."

"Frank was very fond of Annie once. I used to sit and watch them when they were children together, and think what a nice couple they were, poor little things. Is Frank married, Mr. Farley?"

"No, still single."

"What is he now—the old profession?"

"He is Mr. Crawley's collector."

"My gracious! what the same as Mr. Barchard was?"

"Yes."

"Oh! dear, dear—well, I'm very glad—I suppose his salary now is two or three hundred a-year?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"Well, this I will say, Mr. Farley, that Frank Esden was

always a very nice young man—no one esteemed him more than I did.”

Mrs. Tackeridge was still on the look out, even from the little baker's shop in Freshwater, for a husband for her Annie. Well, there was a motherly care in that, a desire to see the better days come back to her daughter at least, and though she let me see every card in her hand, what did that matter?

I was a friend of Frank Esden's at any rate, and I knew Annie was a girl who did not take after father or mother, and would make one of the best wives in the world. I had a hope, too, that if Frank could come suddenly upon her, take her by surprise with his earnestness and passion, the firmness on which she prided herself would give way, and Frank would have another chance of happiness.

I wrote to Frank that day, begging him not to hope too much or be too sanguine, but telling him of my discovery of the long-lost family, and recommending him to get a day's leave,—two if possible,—and join me at Freshwater. The answer to my letter came in Frank himself, hot, impatient, and eager to be off at once to the end of the world, if need were.

In his eagerness, he totally omitted to make any inquiry after my health, or to comment upon my general improvement, and knowing the subject which engrossed every corner of his mind, I readily excused him.

“Where is she?” were almost the first words he addressed to me.

“In Southampton.”

“Why what the deuce have you brought me to this place for, across the Solent and right over this blessed island, when I could have seen her six hours ago?”

“Frank, will you never have patience?”

Frank fumed, wiped his face with his handkerchief, shuffled with his feet, and looked indignantly at me.

“You must hold a council of war with me, my fine fellow,” said I; “or you will spoil all after the old fashion.”

“Go on, then—only look sharp, there's a good chap.”

We talked of Annie, and of the best method for Frank's last attack upon her firmness. I mentioned Mrs. Tackeridge also.

“You must have a prior interview with the old lady, Frank, and obtain her consent.”

“Oh, Lord!”

"Better luck this time, be assured. Do you remember the interview at Ramsgate, Frank, when my cousin and I went out on the balcony to look at the sea?"

Frank shuddered.

"Ah! wasn't that an awful day? upon my soul, it makes me shiver now!"

"Having gained the mother's consent, what can Annie offer in defence?" asked I. "She refused you because her respected mother said 'no'—it is but fair to say 'yes,' when the old lady wishes the marriage."

"Of course, it's only fair," said Frank, brightening up; "I'll pose her with that argument—thank you for the hint, Phil."

"And now, is everything going on well at the mills?"

"Bother the mills!"

"What is the price of whites?"

"Hanged if I know! something like forty-seven or eighty-seven, I'm sure there's a seven in it—where does the old lady live?"

"A mile and a-half from here, in a small baker's shop."

"I'll go at once."

Before I could stop him he was out of the house, and striding down the country lanes, at a pace that considerably astonished the Freshwater natives. He returned in an hour, at the same terrific rate.

"It's all settled—I'm to have her!—what a dear old woman she is! Do you know, Phil, I always liked Mrs. Tackeridge?"

"Mrs. Tackeridge made the same remark concerning yourself only a day or two ago."

"Did she—bless her, she's a good old soul!"

Frank, sitting by the open window, panting for breath and blessing Mrs. Tackeridge, was a sight worth witnessing.

"And now, wish me luck, Phil," said he, suddenly jumping up.

"You are not going—to-day—before dinner!"

"I'm off this very minute—I could not stop here and know Annie was being vexed out of her life—my Annie!—oh! yes, I'm off," buttoning his coat, "here goes."

"You are not going to walk to Cowes?"

"I have got a chaise handy—I ordered that at the Red Lion."

"Frank, Frank, you are getting extravagant!"

"For only once in a way."



"Stop half an hour."

"It's no good my stopping to see you eat," he said, pettishly, "I cannot touch anything myself—never knew such a place as this Isle of Wight, for taking away people's appetites. I could not eat a wafer. Good-bye."

"Good-bye,—good luck!"

Frank vanished. When I looked out of my cottage window his tall figure was half a mile off, on the sunlit road.

So in the sunshine, with hope bright before him, let me leave this faithful, full-hearted lover—let me part with him ere the thread of my story is spun, and this book is shut up for ever and put away on the shelf. Let me part with him here, though in life we still journey together.

Honest Frank was successful, and Annie changed her mind. Better for the character of firmness which this chronicle has given her, had she shaken her head and held fast to the negative; but history must be truthful and stern, and it is well for us sterner sex that there is sometimes an exception to that rule, which says—ladies NEVER change their minds!



## CHAPTER VIII.

### TOGETHER !

STRENGTH increasing slowly at the seaside and summer dying away. Friends far off in London busy at their desks and counters, and I in the lonely village idling away time, from every hour of which I should have coined money. Friends marrying and giving in marriage, and dreaming of eternal happiness; I standing alone gazing at the sea and thinking of a wife beyond it.

The hour had come for my return to London; I had decided on that hour myself, in defiance of medical advisers; I was tired of idleness. If I was not very strong, still I should col-

lect strength by degrees in London ; why should I waste the best days of my youth, and let others win the prize for which I had been striving?

Thinking thus in the evening twilight at the open window from which I had watched Frank Esden go away, with the flower-scented air stealing into the room, with the dusky grey heaven deepening every instant, and the stars beginning to glimmer from its depths. Thinking of home, too, of the home to which I should return, and of that other home—grand and unfortunate—which I had given up ; thinking of my old mill and John Tregancy, of Ellen, and of Rhoda. I went out into the warm night when the hour was late, and walked slowly with hands behind my back towards the bay where the dark sea was rolling in. Dull and dispirited I retraced my steps, and was startled at the corner of the lane to see strange lights flashing near my country home. As I neared the cottage a carriage moved, came whirling by me, and rattled off along the road to Calbourne. Wondering, perplexed, having a strange fear, a strange hope, I hurried to the cottage, opened the swing-gate, and strode quickly up the garden path. There were lights in the room in which I had been sitting an hour before, and a figure passed before the window, the sight of which stopped my breath and struck me motionless.

“ Rhoda ! ”

Another instant and I broke the spell. I was in the cottage, and Rhoda was weeping on my breast !

“ You have come back, then, wife ? ”

“ Yes, yes, for good.”

“ To share my home again and gladden it, or go away with your guardian and leave me here alone ? ”

“ Never more alone, Philip,” she murmured.

“ When you have quite done I’ll just shake hands with Mr. Farley, and then see about a bed somewhere,” observed fat, sunburnt Mr. Creeney.

Mr. Creeney and I shook hands, and Mr. Creeney did not seem inclined to let me free again. He talked of me and Rhoda, asked after my child, my health, my business, with his hand griping mine, and shaking it continually.

“ I am so glad to see you again, Philip,” he said ; “ so glad to get back to merry England, too. But,” looking grave, “ I find you have been deceiving me, Sir.”

“ Have I, Mr. Creeney ? ”

"You know you have, Sir; you have placed no confidence in me, Sir—you have not borrowed a single farthing of me, Sir—what do you mean by *that*?"

"I never borrow money, Mr. Greeney."

"But you shall, Sir!"

I laughed, and shook my head.

"Then, Sir, I'll buy a mill, and paint your name up, and how can you help yourself? You may as well take some of my money before I die, and turn it to your profit, as wait for every farthing afterwards. So don't give me any of your airs, Sir!"

Mr. Greeney marched out in search of a bed, and I sat down by Rhoda's side and drew her to my breast.

"I found it out at last, Philip."

"The secret of my poverty?"

"Yes. Ah! husband, why keep me in the dark concerning it?"

"Rhoda, it was your money, and I did not save a penny of it—how could I tell you of so great a loss?"

"Were you afraid of the shock that it would give me, Philip?"

"Yes."

"You were considerate; but, you were wrong."

"Does it matter dwelling on the theme, now you are with me, and are never going away, Rhoda?"

"Yes."

She checked me in my question by saying—

"I will tell you, Philip, why you were wrong. It is the secret I spoke of before I went away."

"And you will tell me?"

"Everything."

She put her hands upon my shoulders and looked me in the face with her dark, searching eyes.

"In a dreadful hour, Philip, an hour which you and I will mention for the last time here, you confessed that you first sought me for my money. In the merciful hour of my recovery from madness, that was the first truth that came back to me, and burnt into my brain. I felt that you had chosen between me and my money, and that whilst that money lasted, I could never be your wife. I loved you, Philip, very dearly; but that money was my rival, and you loved it better than myself. Don't start so," she cried, "the money is gone, and with a joyful heart I come back to my rightful place—come back a

happy wife and mother, to do my duty by your side, and travel with you hand-in-hand."

"Not shrinking, Rhoda, at the barriers in the way, at the little home in store for us, and the smaller fortune we have to share together?"

"Not shrinking at that—rejoicing!"

I pressed her closer in my arms.

"Rejoicing that I can struggle with you when the storm is highest, consoling you and cheering you," said she, "can share your triumph when the better days come, thanking God we are not separated."

"Rhoda, I am glad I sit here by your side a poor man—that there is a new life for both of us, and we have to begin it with new hearts."

"I begin it, Philip, with a new mind, stronger, I think—I hope—than the one that deserted me in my hour of trial. I have lived to regret the folly of the past and to learn a lesson from it which will last my life."

"Oh! Rhoda, I have yearned for this hour to ask forgiveness, to breathe my love into your ears, to tell you of our boy,—and it has come!"

"And we are happy. Mr. Creeney must not mar that happiness with his wealth, we will struggle for ourselves. Let him leave his fortune to our baby boy, as he at first intended, and let husband and wife seek their fortune out alone."

"It is best. We can look back at our struggles then with pride."

"One question, Philip—no jealous one," with a bright smile on her face.

"I listen."

"Ellen—is she well?"

"Well—and will be a wife some day, I think. She shakes her head at the idea, but a certain Charley Esden is in that pretty head, I think, more often than she owns."

"I shall be glad to see her. She was my sister once—she must be so again," said Rhoda; "and now, Philip, let us steal up stairs and see the boy—my dear, dear little boy!"

We stood by the cot-side and gazed upon our baby's sleep of innocence; our hands were clasped together, a pledge of faith in each other and the future.

The light burned low as we stood there silent watchers. The child slept on, the hoarse murmur of the sea beyond, softened by the distance, lulling him to rest.

Suddenly Rhoda released my hand, looked at me, at the child, then sank down on her knees.

"Leave me, Philip, I must pray for him, for you. God loves not the ungrateful!"

I did not go away. I bowed my head and sank down on my knees beside her.

THE END.



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